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Improving the Developer Experience of Dockerfiles

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Chapter 1

Repairing and Generating Dockerfiles (title is WIP)

Now that we've introduced the problem this thesis revolves around it's time to go over the state of the art. This section covers existing literature and tools that are related to several components of the Dockerfile development experience and Docker in general.

Estes parágrafos deviam sobretudo fazer uma introdução ao capítulo, e ligação com o capítulo anterior. Listar as subsecções e dizer o que elas contêem não tem muito interesse, estas secções podem é explicar melhor de que forma é que as várias secções se relacionam. Mesmo assim, neste caso, como são muitas, fica um pouco maçudo, e acho que não acrescenta muito para o leitor.

1.1 Background

...

1.2 Goals and methodology

Our end goal is to help developers write Dockerfiles. To do this, we first need to know what challenges they face when writing Dockerfiles and how the quality of the Dockerfiles is affected by these challenges. Furthermore, we need to analyze current solutions that address these issues in order to build upon them. With this in mind, we came up with the following research questions:

- **RO1**: What are the challenges that developers face in the development of Dockerfiles?
- **RQ2**: How have these challenges been addressed so far?

To answer these questions we tried to find as much information as possible about Docker and Dockerfiles. Furthermore, we also tried to find works that analyzed a developer's subjective experience when performing development tasks. We ended up using the following queries to look for information in Google Scholar ¹:

- dockerfile generation
- distroless
- · docker build
- dockerfile
- · dockerfile creation
- dockerfile generator
- · dockerfile repair
- · docker repair
- dockerfile readability
- · dockerfile evaluation
- dockerfile analysis
- · docker bloat
- · docker build time
- dockerfile practices
- programming experience

These queries gave us plenty of results, which had to be filtered to reach an amount that could be reasonably analyzed in the amount of time that we were given. We focused on works from the last few years that focused (at least partially) on Docker or Dockerfiles (instead of merely using Docker as a tool due to its convenience). We looked at the title and abstracts of the results to perform our selection and ended up with around 50 works to analyze. Most of these were analyzed, although some had to be excluded due to either time constraints or difficulty accessing the work.

1.3 Challenges in the Development of Dockerfiles

After looking at the literature, we identified several aspects of the Dockerfile development experience that could be considered challenging. This includes the following aspects:

¹Google Scholar, https://scholar.google.com/

- The amount of time required to build an image from a Dockerfile
- The amount of vulnerabilities present in Dockerfiles (and the corresponding images)
- The amount of bloat present in Docker images
- The reliance on trial and error to test Dockerfiles
- The amount of smells contained in Dockerfiles
- The amount of Dockerfiles that do not follow best practices

With these issues in mind, this chapter contains sections that address each of these problems. Additionally, there are also sections dedicated to repairing and generating Dockerfiles since those are features that our tool will provide and could improve the Dockerfile development experience.

Sugiro que incluas aqui um pouco sobre os objetivos desta revisão de literatura. As RQs da

Sugiro que incluas aqui um pouco sobre os objetivos desta revisão de literatura. As RQs da revisão de literatura apareceriam aqui. Além dessas perguntas, fala também um pouco do processo que seguiste para lhes tentar dar resposta, incluindo onde pesquisaste, que queries usaste, quais foram os teus critérios de inclusão/exclusão de resultados, etc.

Sobre as secções que se seguem: cada uma delas endereça um "challenge" diferente no desenvolvimento de dockerfiles, certo? Antes de falares de cada um deste tópicos seria bom ficar mais claro de onde/porque é que aqui aparecem. Talvez a melhor abordagem seja incluires uma nova secção antes das que vêm a seguir, chamada "Challenges in the development of Dockerfiles", ou algo semelhante, que olhe para a literatura e identifique o top dos challenges mais relevantes.

1.4 Speeding up Docker builds

Building Docker images can take a considerable amount of time, especially when a large amount of files have to be fetched from the internet [6]. Therefore, we looked for approaches to reduce the amount of time consumed by this activity. Our findings are summarized in Table 1.1.

ways -> approaches

Dependendo do que disseres acima sobre quais foram as queries que usaste, pode não fazer sentido aqui dizeres que procuraste especificamente por abordagens de aceleração do build. A ver...

A não ser que já o tenhas dito antes (a secção de "Goals ..." acima pode ser um sítio melhor até!) era importante começar esta secção explicando qual é o interesse/importância/relevância para o teu trabalho em fazer esta análise.

Name	Speedup	Limitations	Interferes with normal Docker procedures?	Lines of code	Language used	Is the source code available?
A Code Injec-	Up to	Can only be	Yes	Unknown	Unknown	No
tion Method for	100000x	used with				
Rapid Docker	faster	interpreted				
Image Building [23]		languages,				
[23]		modifica-				
		tions in the				
		source code				
FastBuild:	Up to 10x	Limited to	Yes	2600	Go	No
Accelerating	faster	network	103	2000	30	110
Docker Image		activity				
Building for						
Efficient De-						
velopment and						
Deployment of						
Container [11]						
Slacker: Fast	Up to 20x	Limited to	Yes	Unknown	Unknown	No
Distribution	faster	network				
with Lazy		activity				
Docker Con-						
tainers [6]		_				
Docker Buildx ²	Unknown	Unknown	No	Unknown	Go	Yes

Table 1.1: Works about speeding up Docker builds

Na tabela tens uma coluna sobre complexidade de implementação que é muito subjetiva. Melhor do que isso seria usares colunas com coisas objetivas mas que te permitam concluir sobre a complexidade no texto que acompanha a tabela.

Wang et al. [23] propose a technique that bypasses typical building procedures by injecting the code modifications directly in an image. The results are very promising. However, due to the nature of approach, it can only be used with interpreted languages and will not accelerate builds related to modifications in development artifacts that are not source code.

 $^{^2} Docker\ Buildx, \verb|https://docs.docker.com/engine/reference/commandline/buildx/|$

Huang et al. [11] and Harter et al. [6] address the network bottleneck in different ways. The former caches files locally and intercepts Docker's network requests in order to serve files that have been stored locally. The latter proposes a new storage driver that lazily fetches files from the network. Both show promising results and do not address other inefficiencies in the Docker building process. FastBuild was implemented using around 2600 lines of Go code.

The works described so far interfere with the normal Docker build procedures and do not have public source code for their tools. This makes them harder to implement. Another solution is offered by the Docker development team, Buildx. Buildx makes use of a newer backend, Build-Kit ³, which brings many features that can potentially accelerate docker builds. However, to our knowledge, an apples to apples time comparison has not been made. Implementing this in Dockerlive wouldn't be very hard but because the output of the buildx command is different, some modifications would still be required.

1.5 Dockerfile Generation

Writing Dockerfiles is not an easy process [21]. Therefore, having a way to generate a Dockerfile for a given project can be very useful. In this section, we looked for works that showcased ways to accomplish this. Our findings are summarized in Table 1.2.

No parágrafo anterior, "easy" não parece ser o melhor adjetivo — fácil comparaticamente com quê? No artigo que citas estávamos interessados sobretudo em aferir quão mais trabalhosas eram umas atividades **comparaticamente com outras**. Este "easy" não tem uma base de comparação tão clara.

As duas primeiras frases que aqui tens estão a servir essencialmente para motivar a importancia do que vais falar nesta secção. Algo que pode ajudar mais a fazer isso é definires bem os objetivos de todo este capítulo (com as perguntas, secção sobre os challenges, etc. Ver o que escrevi acima).

³Docker BuildKit, https://docs.docker.com/build/buildkit/

Name	Successful gener-	Limitations	Implementation
	ation rate		Complexity
Applying Model-Driven	Unknown	An Open API Spec	Medium
Engineering to Stim-		is required	
ulate the Adoption of			
DevOps Processes in			
Small and Medium-			
Sized Development			
Organizations [22]			
Burner: Recipe Au-	Up to 80%	A vast knowledge	High
tomatic Generation for		graph is required,	
HPC Container Based		focused on Singu-	
on Domain Knowledge		larity	
Graph [28]			
Container-Based Mod-	Unknown	Requires the use of	Medium-High
ule Isolation for Cloud		templates to gener-	
Services [12]		ate the files	
DockerGen: A Knowl-	Up to 73%	A vast knowledge	High
edge Graph based	•	graph is required	
Approach for Software			
Containerization [26]			
DockerizeMe: Au-	Up to 30%	Limited to Python,	High
tomatic Inference of	•	requires a knowl-	
Environment Depen-		edge base	
dencies for Python Code			
Snippets [10]			
ExploitWP2Docker: a	Up to 39%	Limited to security	Low-Medium
Platform for Automat-	•	testing scenarios	
ing the Generation of			
Vulnerable WordPress			
Environments for Cyber			
Ranges [4]			
MAKING CONTAIN-	Unknown	Requires Python	Medium-High
ERS EASIER WITH		code to generate	
HPC CONTAINER		the files	
MAKER [17]			

Table 1.2: Works about generating Dockerfiles

1.6 Dockerfile Smells 7

Se a memória não me falha, o DockerizeMe só fuciona para snippets, e não para um sistema completo.

A coluna sobre a complexidade é um pouco subjetiva...

Zhong et al. [28], Ye et al. [26] and Horton et al. [10] present solutions that require pre-existing knowledge bases in order to generate the files, making them hard to implement in a project like ours, which is not completely focused on file generation. DockerizeMe is also limited to Python environments, while Burner is more focused on Singularity ⁴, a containerization tool similar to Docker but focused on HPC (High Performance Computing).

Caturano et al. [4] propose a tool that uses Docker to generate security testing environments from exploit descriptions. Sorgalla et al. [22]'s work can generate Dockerfiles from models, which are generated from Open API Specifications (like Swagger ⁵). Kehrer et al. [12] use Apache FreeMarker ⁶ to generate Dockerfiles from templates. McMillan et al. [17] offer a tool that allows developer to use Python code to define the information required to generate Dockerfiles.

All these works show varying degrees of success and some of them are not even focused on the Dockerfile generation aspect.

1.6 Dockerfile Smells

Smells are commonly found in Dockerfiles [24], making it important to create ways of detecting and, if possible, remove them. This section covers works related to this. Our findings are summarized in Table 1.3.

⁴Singularity, https://apptainer.org/

⁵Swagger, https://swagger.io/

⁶Apache FreeMarker, https://freemarker.apache.org/

Name	Smells	Findings	Possible repair implementation
			complexity
An Empirical Case	Temporary File	The smell is quite	Medium
Study on the Temporary		common and can	
File Smell in Docker-		be divided into 4	
files [16]		different types, 3 of	
		which can be de-	
		tected through the	
		proposed methods	
An empirical study on	SATD	Shows that a type	High
self-admitted technical		of smell appears	
debt in Dockerfiles [2]		in Dockerfiles and	
		can be divided into	
		several classes and	
		subclasses	
Characterizing the Oc-	All	Smells appear	High
currence of Dockerfile		commonly in	
Smells in Open-Source		projects and the	
Software: An Empirical		frequency with	
Study [24]		which they appear	
		varies according to	
		several metrics	
Dockerfile TF Smell	Temporary File	It's possible to de-	Medium
Detection Based on		tect the smell with	
Dynamic and Static		high accuracy us-	
Analysis Methods [25]		ing static and dy-	
		namic analysis	

Table 1.3: Works about Dockerfile smells

Mais do que listar/caracterizar artigos, idealmente estas tabelas seriam sobre as coisas que te interessam encontrar. Por exemplo, nesta secção estás interessado é nos smells, logo, acho que faria mais sentido ser uma tabela de smells, em que indicavas o artigo em que o encontraste (em vez de uma tabela de artigos em que indicas os smells, estou a fazer sentido?). A mesma ideia é aplicável às outras secções.

Lu et al. [16] and Xu et al. [25] have focused on the temporary file smell and propose ways to detect this smell. A repair to deal with this smell could be implemented using the information provided by these works.

Azuma et al. [2] focus on a variation of smells they call SATD (self-admitted technical debt)

which can be detected in comments written in the Dockerfiles. Due to the nature of these SATDs, implementing repairs to eliminate them could be very complicated.

Wu et al. [24] analyzed a large amount of open-source projects and found that Dockerfile smells are very common and their frequency changes according to several factors like the programming language used by the project or the project's age. Due to the variety of smells covered by this study implementing repairs to deal with all of them would be difficult.

1.7 Dockerfile Good Practices

To prevent the creation of smells like the ones mentioned in Section 1.6, a developer should follow good practices. This section goes over works that cover these practices. Our findings are summarized in Table 1.4.

Name	Practices	Limitations	Practices that
			could be imple- mented
Learning from, Under-	Related to usage of	No inherent repair	All of them
standing, and Support-	package managers	functionality	
ing DevOps Artifacts	and command line		
for Docker [8]	utilities (gold rules)		
Security Misconfigura-	Practices that make	Limited to im-	Most of them
tions Detection and Re-	an image more se-	proving security	
pair in Dockerfile [19]	cure	(although these	
		practices have	
		other benefits)	
Ten simple rules for	Rules 3,4,5 and 9	Focused on data	Rules 5 and 9
writing Dockerfiles for	are applicable to	science	
reproducible data sci-	every scenario		
ence [18]			

Table 1.4: Works about Dockerfile good practices

Henkel et al. [8] mined rules from Dockerfiles created by experts, allowing them to create a set of "gold rules", a set of patterns that often appear in Dockerfiles written by these experts. All of these "gold rules" could be implemented as repairs.

Prinetto et al. [19] looked for flaws in Dockerfiles that could lead to vulnerabilities in a system. As part of that work they list a set of practices developers should follow to improve a Docker image's security. Most of the practices listed could be implemented as repair, although some of them would be too complex to implement.

Nust et al. [18] propose a list of 10 rules developers should follow when writing Dockerfiles for data science environments. Some of these rules are applicable to other scenarios and 2 of those could be implemented as repairs.

1.8 Dockerfile Security

Nowadays, security is a topic that is heavily discussed and deserves a great amount of attention from developers. However, security problems are still commonly found in Dockerfiles [5] and many developers do not have the knowledge required to evaluate how vulnerable their containers are [27]. For these reasons, it's important to study Docker containers from a security perspective, which is what this section focuses on. Our findings are summarized in Table 1.5.

Name	Findings	Implementation notes	
DAVS: Dockerfile Anal-	DAVS can detect more vul-	It should be possible to re-	
ysis for Container Im-	nerabilities than competing	pair some of the mentioned	
age Vulnerability Scan-	scanners	vulnerabilities, although it	
ning [5]		would be easier to use exist-	
		ing scanners	
Investigating the inner	Many scanners use the same	Using one of these scanners	
workings of container im-	methods to detect vulnerabil-	could be useful	
age vulnerability scanners	ities, which have limitations		
[27]			
Outdated software in con-	Having outdated software	It should be possible to im-	
tainer images [15]	in containers brings security	plement some repair to try to	
	problems and there are	address this situation	
	limitations to what current		
	scanners can detect, new		
	detection method is proposed		
Security Analysis of Code	Removing bloat from con-	It should be possible to im-	
Bloat in Machine Learn-	tainers used in machine	plement some repairs that re-	
ing Systems [1]	learning environments can	duce bloat	
	considerably improve secu-		
	rity		
Security Misconfigu-	Security problems are com-	It might be possible to imple-	
rations Detection and	mon in containers, a way to	ment the proposed technique	
Repair in Dockerfile [19]	repair them is proposed to repair the problems		

Table 1.5: Works about Dockerfile security

Doan et al. [5] propose DAVS (Dockerfile analysis-based vulnerability scanning), a tool that can detect potentially vulnerable files in containers. This approach allows them to detect more

vulnerabilities than current scanners, which, according to Zarei et al. [27], rely on information provided by distribution package managers. This information can be manipulated and, in some cases, may not even be available, which prevents scanners from detecting vulnerabilities.

Ahmed et al. [1] used Cimplifier [20] to debloat containers used in machine learning environments and found the amount of vulnerabilities present in those containers was significantly reduced.

Linnalampi et al. [15] found that having outdated software introduces vulnerabilities in containers and propose a new method to detect vulnerabilities by analyzing the binaries present in containers to detect the software versions that are in use. This approach would address some of the limitations of current scanning techniques.

Prinetto et al. [19] found that security problems are common and propose a way to repair them by processing the Dockerfile to obtain the abstract syntax tree, find the vulnerabilities and modify the tree before reconverting into a file that is no longer vulnerable.

Implementing repairs that address most of the problems and vulnerabilities found by these works should be possible. It may even be possible to use some of the proposed approaches.

1.9 Dockerfile Repair

Like the previous sections have shown, the average Dockerfile has several problems and it can be difficult for a developer to figure out how to deal with those issues in an optimal way. This makes it important to create tools that can assist developers in the repair process. This section goes over works that do that (although other sections also discuss works that perform repairs that are related to more specific scenarios). Our findings are summarized in Table 1.6.

Name	Performed repair	Limitations	Implementation
			Complexity
Latest Image	Base image update	Does not cover	Medium
Recommenda-		other parts of the	
tion Method for		Dockerfile	
Automatic Base			
Image Update in			
Dockerfile [13]			
Learning from,	Enforcing the gold	Does not perform	Medium
Understanding,	rules by detecting	the repair, only	
and Supporting	violations	helps detect places	
DevOps Artifacts		where they should	
for Docker [8]		be performed	
RUDSEA: recom-	Updates portions	Does not cover	Medium-High
mending updates	of the source code	parts other parts of	
of Dockerfiles via	which are tied to	the Dockerfile	
software environ-	values in the source		
ment analysis [7]	code		
Shipwright: A	Repairs that deal	Some of the repairs	Medium
Human-in-the-	with some func-	listed can only be	
Loop System for	tional problems	applied to some	
Dockerfile Repair		projects	
[9]			
Supporting micro-	Reducing the num-	Small number of	Low-Medium
services deploy-	ber of layers in	repairs	
ment in a safer	the image to take		
way: a static anal-	advantage of layer		
ysis and automated	caching		
rewriting approach			
[3]			

Table 1.6: Works about Dockerfile repair

Kitajima et al. [13] focused on updating a container's base image by analyzing the available tags, while Hassan et al. [7] focused on portions of the Dockerfile which are tied to values in the source code.

Henkel et al. [8] offers a way to detect violations of the gold rules they obtained but don't automate the repair of said violations. Henkel et al. [9] also proposes a different approach for automating repairs, although most of the repairs listed here are specific to certain programming languages or package managers.

1.10 Dockerfile Bloat

Benni et al. [3] describe a way to reduce the number of layers in Dockerfiles in order to take advantage of layer caching.

Implementing the repairs mentioned in this section should be possible, although these implementations would have varying degrees of complexity.

1.10 Dockerfile Bloat

1.11 Dockerfile Testing

1.12 General Discussion

Ksontini et al. [14] focused on refactorings (a concept which is closely tied to smells) and found that developers' main motivations for performing refactorings were tied to maintainability and image size among others. Implementing some of these refactorings as repairs would be useful, although implementing all of them would be challenging.

Seria aqui um bom sítio onde responder de forma mais explícita às perguntas que colocamos no início do capítulo.

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