
Development of an interactive dashboard for performance reports on IBM Z systems with Linux

Term Paper T3000

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Contents

1 Introduction

Data is a valuable resource (1), especially when analyzing or comparing the performance of different technologies. With test data, it's possible to find bottlenecks in applications or errors in the process flow. However, most large data set are useless until there have been evaluated or visualized to gain insights. The visualization makes it easier for the analyst to understand the relations and evolutions inside the data. As result, it makes his work more efficient. Nevertheless, visualization takes valuable time, especially when it has to be done over and over again. There are several software solutions on the market [Meek.2017] to automate these visualizations and get fast insights, like *Tableau* or *Voyager 2* (???). But there are also circumstances which require highly customized reports, as it is necessary for the *IBM z Linux Performance* department.

The *IBM z Linux Performance* department has several test procedures to evaluate the IBM Z Mainframes on Linux for several workloads. These test runs result in different kinds of reports. By now these reports had to be manually analyzed. The goal of this project is to support the performance analysts by creating an interactive dashboard for their requirements. The dashboard aims to automate the process of visualization without losing the flexibility in the data presentation.

This paper presents a working dashboard with specialized performance visualizations. It discusses the design choices for technology and architecture in this application and the ideas behind the different visualizations. The report highlights the advantages of this tool as well as further challenges.

Therefore the reader will be introduced to the design aspects of data visualization and the requirements for an interactive performance visualization dashboard. The first chapter explains how effective data visualization has to be implemented. The second provides a case study for the application, which includes detailed information about the data source.

On this foundation, the technologies and architecture of the application will be explained. The part compares the different technology options and underlines the design decisions.

Based on the architecture the dashboard prototype will be explained and which further improvements could be implemented.

2 Concepts of data visualization

What means data visualization

Visualization meant in its original sense to “construct a visual image in the mind” (???). In the computer science the understanding for this term is different, as Earnshaw defines it:

“Scientific Visualization is concerned with exploring data and information in such a way as to gain understanding and insight into the data.” (???)

The term is now referring to building an visual image based on data. In a more general context its data visualization. There are multiple definitions for the term data visualization on different levels of abstraction (???). In the words of Ignatius and Senay:

“The primary objective in data visualization is to gain insight into an information space.” (???)

Data visualization has varieties like in information or scientific visualization [Friendly]. These terms have a slightly different semantical definition. Information visualization is more precise, because it presents the data in a specific interpretation context (S. 4f, ???). The term scientific visualization is mostly used in the context of visualization for science research (???). Because the distinction is not relevant for this paper, the terms will be used equally in the further chapters.

The dashboard described in this paper is a tool for information visualization. Therefore information visualization will be described shortly. According to Gershon information visualization “combines aspects of scientific visualization, human-computer interfaces, data mining, imaging and graphics” (???)

Information visualization has two main goal (???):

- data representation, by transferring the data in a suitable layout for presentation
- data exploration or visual data mining, discovery of new knowledge by transforming and inter-connecting the data.

The data representation should allow to find and view the data on specific criteria. The representation should contain multiple views on the selection with a different context. The representation easy to keep in mind, to support the analyst.

The data exploration should highlight relations and structures in the data. To find insights multiple data sets should be interconnect-able. (???)

The process of data visualization

Russell Ackoff defines the process of discovering new knowledge in three abstract levels for the perceptual and cognitive space (???). The paper by Chen et al. extends these definitions for the computational space (???). These levels are:

Data - Data is a concatenation of different symbols, for example strings. In the computer science data can be any stored representations of a model or an attribute in the memory.

Information - Information is processed data that has been given a context. The context can be assigned by either a computational process or humans annotating the data.

Knowledge - Knowledge is an application of data and information to understand the processes and developments that created the data. This can be the result of a machine learning process or analysis by subject matter experts.

Understanding - Understanding extends the knowledge by providing explanations for the developments in the data.

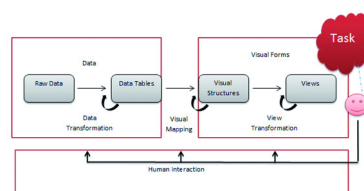


Figure 2.1: Process of visualization

The process of visualization has been defined in a reference model by Card, Mackinlay and Shneiderman (???, ???, ???). The model has three transformation phases, to transform the data between the different levels of knowledge. In the beginning the raw data is transformed into structured tables. Data in tabular form is easier to visualize. The *data* becomes *information*.

The visual mapping converts the data tables into visual structures. These have graphical properties instead of the mathematical relation inside the tables. The mapping into structures results in possible *knowledge* for the viewer. Such a mapping depends on the chosen chart type and if the data is discrete or continuous.

In the last transformation step, the visualization is adjusted to highlight parts of the data and get a better *understanding*. On a user driven dashboard, the user **interacts with the visualization** to create different views.

The model has also been refined by dos Santos (???), adding a new data filtering step after the general data transformations. In the opinion of the author this model over specifies for most modern use cases, where big data sets are evaluated in real time and can be filtered in the frontend. Furthermore the model is specialized on generating images. When the visualization is rendered for example on the

server side this model is applicable, but in a modern visualization frontend, the visualization doesn't have to be a picture or in Ben Shneidermans words: "The purpose of visualization is insight, not pictures." (???)

Visualization best practices

In an interactive dashboard the user can adjust his view of the data, but not the kind of representation. The representation type is stills defined in the visual structures. Best practices for visualization help to develop an appealing visual mapping for the data. The chapter summarizes the Graphical excellence points laid out by Edward Tufte (???, S.13, ???).

Show the complete data - Provide the data source, with its limitations

Data over Visualization - Encourage the viewer to think about the substance rather than it's representation or methodology

Assume an Intelligent Audience - Don't oversimplify the data or the visualization, induce the viewer to think about the data

Encourage data exploration - show the data at several levels of detail, from broad overview to the fine structure, enable comparisons for different pieces of data

Make data understandable - integrate verbal descriptions in the dataset, avoid distorting what the data have to say and follow conventions when presenting the data.

Avoid confusing charts - choosing the wrong representation can unintentionally confuse or deliberately mislead the viewer.

Choosing the best chart type

How easily the user is able to work with the data depends mainly on the type of chart. Mackinlay and Tufte use their publication to explain their selection of visualization type based on sets of examples. This paper will not summarize their main works. Instead it will use simple classifications guidelines for the choice of visualization. To decide if either a chart or another representation is used, the Visual Thinking Codex by Dan Roam will be applied. This paper expects that all data will be represented as chart. Because of that a chart selection diagram by Andrew Abela should help to use the best chart visualization (???)

The Visual Thinking Codex is a tool for visual thinking by Dan Roam (???). Visual thinking is methodology to organize the thoughts by visualizing them. The codex is using another tool called SQVID. The idea behind SQVID is that you can think of things in a variety of different ways. Simple or Elaborate,

Qualitative vs Quantitative, Vision and Execution, Individual against Comparison, Difference/change or As is. (???)

The codex suggest different types of visualization. The decision is based on the question that should answer and kind focus in the SQUID methodology.

Any z performance analyst ask primarily two kinds of question *How* is sth. or *Why* is it like this. For example *How* much memory is used?, or *Why* are we loosing performance?. These question come form different view angles, so that no filtering based on the kind thinking can by made. But on the questions only it can be seen that plots and charts are the primary visualization type. Therefore a further chart study can provide some advice for choosing the right chart. (???)

As part of the Extreme Presentation™ Method Abela did provide a Chart Suggestion graphic which can help to chose the right presentation method. The main question is after what should be shown. An comparison can be shown with bar or column charts. Distribution may be better with histograms. A relationship requires a bubble or scatter chart and a composition can be shown with stacked or pie charts. This source is just meant to be a simple overview and is not in any meaning complete. (???)

Good resources (???) for a more detailed exploration of graphs are the following. For the fundamentals of graph design “Show Me the Numbers” by Stephen few is a helpful resource. The best encyclopedic reference for visualization is “Information Graphics” by Robert Harris. For a even more detailed exploration of visualization “The Visual Display of Quantitative Information” by Edward (???) and “The Elements of Graphing Data” by William Cleveland can be used.

The “perception edge” blog (???) provides a collection of different papers, with solutions for more or less common problems when developing chart. Some of these suggestion will be used in the further implementation.

3 Use case study of the application requirements

Building a good visualization is not easy. To build the perfect visualization this chapter will introduce design principles, processed and an overview how the actual data looks like. Together these information should help to develop an dashboard on the needs of the user and with the right processes or technologies.

Use Case Analytics with User Experience principles

Choosing a matching visualization type makes the data understandable. According to Tufte good graphics are furthermore encouraging the viewers also to explore the data set. Therefore this paper is proposing an interactive dashboard. To ensure the best user experience on the dashboard, this chapter will introduce the User Interface (UI) Design and User Experience (UX) Design. In simple words is UI how things **look** and UX how things **work**. (???) This chapter will outline the main UI design principles and which UX processes help to develop the best user experience.

UI design principles

Good UI design and suitable design principles have been defined by many authors over the time. The paper will cite three publications on different degree of details. At first the main principles of design will be presented based on the Donald Normans book “The Design of Everyday Things”. Than these principles will be specialized for the UI design. At last the principles of website design will be explained based on “Don’t Make Me Think” by Steve Krug.

Thinking about the design of a product before building it, results in more user-friendly products. Norman provides seven principles, which good designers should follow.

Provide the Necessary Knowledge - The user build his own conceptual model how the thing is working. Good design provides the information to interpret and understand the object. It contains visible clues for their function.

Simplify - The complexity of the product increases as the square of the features. To simplify tasks four

methods, can be used. Provide the user a simple, intuitive mental aid. Show feedback to the user instead of making them remember things. Third and Fourth, automate functions and change the way of presenting the information.

Show How to Use a Tool and Explain Its State - The user should know about the consequences of their actions and the devices gave them feedback promptly.

Map Correctly - Developing a product should consider the user's natural mappings (e.g. "up" more naturally suggests "louder" than does "left")

Use Constraints - Contains help to understand the product. The lead the user to use the product in the correct way.

Expect Errors - If the user can create an error, it's very likely he will do so. Good design prevents as much errors as possible and gives informative feedback, for those that cannot be prevented. Most errors are either "slips" or "mistakes." Slips are errors by accident, like throwing the wrong document in the trash. Mistakes, on the other hand, are conscious actions, taken by having the wrong goal or misleading information.

Consider Standardizing - Standards are useful because they base your application on a ground of common knowledge for all users. Consider a car, wherever on the road you take a car, there are all operating the same way.

For User Interfaces the core practices concentrate more on the style aspects of the application. There are five key principles a good UI is measured on (???)

Color - The color is influencing the emotions of the viewer. Some meanings of colors are predefined like red for attention. Knowing about the psychology of colors is important. Principles of color do also include using matching color schemes for charts or web elements. (???)

Balance - Balance in the design context is arranging elements to establish a positive communication to the user. Getting interest and positive feedback by the user is achieved by multiple criteria, like symmetry, asymmetry, or alignment. (???)

Contrast - Contrast is used for three main reasons. 1. Contrast is attractive to the eye, 2. It helps to organize information or build a hierarchy, 3. The Contrast moves elements in the focus of the viewer. (???)

Typography - Fonts and the content itself are the main influence how users process the given information. Therefore they should be chosen with caution. (???)

Consistency - Consistency is the key principle in UI design. It makes the product intuitive, usable and eliminates confusion. Consistency is based on familiar patterns and common visuals like color schemes, same typography or spaces between elements. (???)

This work will create a User Interface in the web as explained further in chapter XY. Steven Krug did summarize the key principles for website Design in his book. To get a basic understanding about good Website Design his core point will here be summarized.

Create a clear visual hierarchy – Like defined by consistency principle the web page should "clearly

and accurately portray the relationships among the things on the page.” If elements are conceptually linked, they are visually linked as well. Important aspects are highlighted with visual cues, like bold or larger fonts.

Take advantage of conventions – Standardizations in webpages make use their conventions. This can recognizable icons, like a person for the login profile or design languages like Material Design for the webpage.

Break up pages into clearly defined areas – Create different views for every independent context.

Make it obvious what’s clickable – People click use a website. The indication of clickable items and action make it easier for the user to understand *how to use the tool*

Minimize noise – To avoid distractions on the web interface remove anything that draws the users away from your focus.

User Experience processes

In contrast to the UI Design, the User Experience Design is a creative process to find the best design by analyzing the user (??). It helps the business to define the brand image, based on the target group. The sales and the site traffic are increasing, because of the users are enjoying the product. And in general UX establishing customer loyalty and goodwill (??).

Good User Experience has three primary descriptions: Useful, Usable, Delightful. Useful means that the solution is matching all user needs, also the need they might not be aware of. Usable describes the product to be easy to use and intuitive, the user need no concentration for the basic functions. Delightful is your interface or product if the user enjoys it. It motivates the user to work with it.

Every UX design process has some common features, which will be explained shortly. These steps help to develop a great user experience. Therefore these processes are used while developing the dashboard. (??)

The first step of each UX workflow is research (??). This step is about requiring data and thinking about to user. Based on this data different group of people sharing similar goals can be distinguished. Here starts the UX Analysis, also called UX Strategy (??). In this part the data about persons brought in some context. These groups are bundles into the a Persona. A persona contains the behaviors, interests and goals for a user group (??). The persona are then extended with user stories and scenario maps. The user story describes from the users perspective what the product should accomplish or how it should be working (??). In extension a scenario map is build. The scenario map is analyzing the step a user will take to accomplish a given task (??). Based on the concrete UX methodology further analysis is done.

When the UX Analysis is completed, the actual UX Design starts. This includes building a variety of different Wireframes to build Interaction Prototypes for the best ideas. Good design means in UX not automatically good aesthetics. Actually aesthetics has the lowest priority in the product design, more

important is a consistent, structured and understandable layout (???).

Finally the UI implementation will be done and delivered to test and validate the design. Therefore metrics and analytics tools are used to track how the users use our product and how satisfied there are.

To achieve good user experience many companies use a specific methodology. Very popular are Design Thinking (???) or the Double Diamond (???) process. IBM is using an modified version of Design Think called IBM Design Thinking (???).

Use case study of the data source

All reports are stored in one server directory which the visualization dashboard has access to. The data storage contains reports of different kinds. These reports contain monitored performance data for IBM Z systems on Linux. This section provides a short overview about the raw data formats, that can be visualized by the application stack. This are four different formats: System Activity Report reports for Linux, profiling binary data and graphviz files in general, textual log files in a specific format and internal reports for processing units.

The System Activity Reports are collected by a Linux tool called *sar*. *Sar* is part of the *sysstat* package. Sysstat is a collection of performance monitoring tools maintained by Sebastien Godard. The *sar* command line utility collects multiple datasets, most important of which are the activity of CPU, transfer rates of the disk or utilization of memory. A complete list of collected data can be gathered from the *sar* manual (???). The resulting data is stored in three formats, in textual data (*sartxt*), tabular CSV data (*sarcsv*) and in JSON form (*sarjson*). The data the application works with looks like this (*sarcsv*):

Listing 3.1: Sysstat report - *sarcsv* file

```
1 # hostname;interval;timestamp;CPU;%usr;%nice;%sys;%iowait;%steal;%irq;%  
  soft;%guest;%gnice;%idle  
2 r72klaus;10;2017-12-21 12:24:34 UTC  
  ;-1;63.88;0.00;24.48;0.00;0.01;0.24;9.14;0.00;0.00;2.25  
3 r72klaus;10;2017-12-21 12:24:34 UTC  
  ;0;63.44;0.00;25.77;0.00;0.00;0.20;8.19;0.00;0.00;2.40  
4 ...  
5 # hostname;interval;timestamp;proc/s;cswh/s  
6 r72klaus;10;2017-12-21 12:24:34 UTC;13.60;399407.80  
7 r72klaus;10;2017-12-21 12:24:44 UTC;1.10;391299.20  
8 ....
```

Sar is a often used tool for performance monitoring in Linux. Because of that, there exists multiple

visualization tools, which can be used to get visualization inspirations.

The programs running on IBM Z are also profiles with different profiling tools, such as perf or gprof. The application is analyzing these reports by itself. The application stack makes use of an existing visualization program developed by Jose Fonseca called gprof2dot. The tool can handle the data from all popular profiling tool for C, Python or Java. This tool return graphs in the graphviz dot format. The application should render these graphs.

The textual log report have a special naming convention and marker for the relevant data inside. The naming convention distinct's them from normal text files. The files look like this:

```
{caption=&quot;Logfile for Tensorflow tests&quot;;} WARNING:tensorflow:  
Using temporary folder as model directory: /tmp/tmp6bU9WX 2017-12-11  
17:37:38.556092: I tensorflow/core/platform/cpu_feature_guard.cc:137] Your  
CPU supports instructions that this TensorFlow binary was not compiled  
to use: AVX512F ... ###START### REAL:0.000411033630371 CPU:0.000412 Total  
words: 7664 ... ###PREPARE### REAL:2.52717900276 CPU:2.520947 ###TRAIN###  
REAL:248.245265961 CPU:383.199024 ...
```

The forth format for the processing unit reports is yet another log format. One log files contain about a hundred headers for data that's commonly in tabular form.

Current visualization workflow for the performance analysts

At the point of this paper an web application for browsing performance data existed. This work was based on the idea of visualising all the data that can be accessed by this application.

The current application has only some basic features. It provides a login page, which provides a protection for all other pages. These pages where static web pages like a documentation site and a dynamic view for a server directory to download files.

To visualize the performance reports, they have to be downloaded and then externally visualized. The data often needs to be pre-processed by some script before the visualization.

Visualizing the reports directly in the current application would simplify the visualization workflow. It makes the pre-processing unnecessary and create a data-driven visualization automatically. This is speeding up thing and help the users to focus on the real problems.

Results of the use case analysis - What are the requirements for the dashboard.

This chapter will summarize the information, goals etc from the users for the application gathered based on the processes described before.

4 Architecture decisions based on the use case

In the previous chapter the ideas and goals for the new dashboard had been collected. This chapter will discuss how these ideas determine the architecture of the application. This chapter will also define the requirements for the technologies based on the architecture and the goals for the application.

Architecture overview to achieve the application goals

The dashboard application will continue using the two-tier architecture. The primary reason for this architecture decision is the simple handling of users and files (S, 43ff, ???). The server part can handle access and provision of the files. The client visualizes the data for the user. Which options of splitting the visualization pipeline are possible discusses the graphic by Tominski shown below (???).

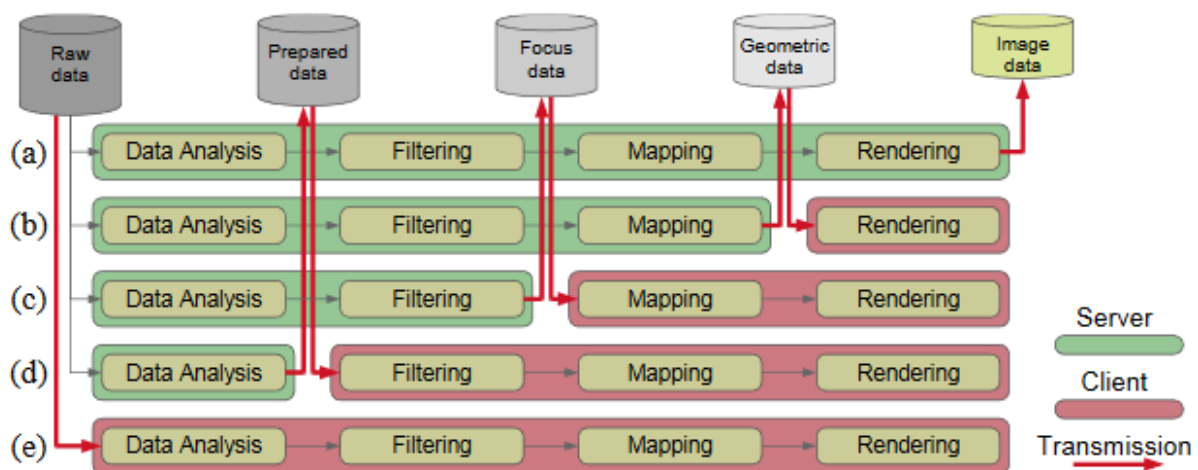


Figure 4.1: visualization pipeline in client-server scenarios

The raw data is stored on the server, sending the unprocessed data to the client is a poorly performing approach. The provisioning of large report files would take too long. Therefore the data need to be pre-processed on the server. The client should be able to get the pre-processed, but he can present only a subset of it in each view. One user scenario is that the analyst takes just a short look into the

dataset. In this case he sees only one or a few views. Requesting the complete set of data would result in long initial loading times for each report. In an improved version the client request only the data the user wants to see. Therefore the server subsets the data for specific views.

Further work on the server side like mapping or rendering the data (???) would speed up the clients loading time enormously (???). But in the same scale it would increase the required processing power on the server. For many clients this solution would not be scalable. Because of that option c in the figure will be implemented.

The more generic reference model for data visualization by Ben Shneiderman helps to further distinct the tasks between server and client. The server will handle all data, while the client will present the visual forms. The data transmission between the two components should be implemented in a standardized way, which allow parameters for the different views and files. The model distinct also the routing task between client and server. The server makes the routing between the different files/data sources. He will route the client to the reporting component for this file. The client on the other hand will handle the routing between the different views inside the selected dataset.

Backend technology requirements

According the the architecture the backend has three main tasks: reading data in different formats, analysis and pre-processing the data and the provide the data in a standardized way. Additionally the backend need to deliver the web pages to the clients.

The data provisioning should be implemented with stateless protocol. A stateless protocol is simple to use and to implement. The simple protocol makes the testing of the interface easier. A stateful implementation would perform better a few clients, but with to many open connections the application would crash. When using stateful protocol the server would need to keep the large data tables in memory, and so the application would scale badly. Another advantage is the loosely coupling between client and server, this simplifies independent development of front- and backend.(???, ???)

The most common programming paradigm for stateless web request is REST. The REST interface also improves the scalability of the application. Since each query is context-free, each query needs the same amount of resources. This makes it easier to scale the application and identify bottlenecks in the application. When focusing on the frontend, the REST API will not restrict the technology or language that can be used. This enables this work to experiment with different frontend solutions without changing the backend. It's also helpful for using different types of frameworks based on the report type.

An emerging technology in this area is also GraphQL (???). While GraphQL is great for performing highly specialized query's. It adds unnecessary complexity to a simple API service (???). Since the planned API provides only a subset of the report in a table pattern, without any filter condition REST will be the

better choice in sense of complexity and maintainability.

Together with the web request the application has to handle normal HTTP request to deliver the frontend application. For a reliable and fast user interface these request should be handled by a fast and lightweight web framework, with REST support.

Reading and analyzing the report data from different formats is the core backend feature. The backend has to handle the diversity of the different formats without deduction of performance or extreme incensement in code complexity. Therefore the backend language should provide fast I/O operations and libraries that can work on large data sets. The libraries should be able to import, filter and provide different kinds of as textual and tabular data. The backend should also run scripts on the shell, to work with the binary blobs from profiling tools.

Dashboard technology requirements

Required frontend components

The dashboard will be integrated in the existing application for browsing the performance reports. The users doesn't need and want another interface for viewing the reports, building another graphical or web user interface would be counterproductive. This means the dashboard development is web-based. A web-based application has also other advantages for the use case like device diversity or bookmarking of important views (???).

The web application is based HTML documents which will be styled by CSS stylesheets. The dashboard has to react on user interactions, route between views and needs to visualize structured data. To modify the static HTML documents, most effort will go into the JavaScript(JS) code, which is able to manipulate the existing Document Object Model (DOM) of the HTML files.

To implement the frontend tasks, each task will be supported by at least one frontend component. The components are simplifying the implementation by providing different programming interfaces. The frontend stack contains three components: a framework for building user interfaces, a kit of style elements and visualization library

The UI framework is required to handle the user interaction to build and route the different views. The styling components ensure a consistent user experience and provide building bocks for the UI forms. The visualization library is handle the frontend part of the visualization pipeline. It will map the data into visual structures and render them. The following three chapters analyze the requirements for each of these components based on the use case study.

Requirements for the UI frameworks

The UI library will be chosen based on the following criteria's separately per report module. The main reason for using such a library should be to **improve programming speed**. Therefore a library should only be chosen, to make the code more readable and add no unnecessary extra complexity. The library should be lightweight, flexible and **easy to integrate** in the current application stack. As discussed before for the API interface the application and therefore the frontend should be **scalable**. Effectively this should also mean that the library has a **robust performance**. The performance should also be testable without an extra application layer. Finally, the library should be **stable** and good to trust. This means it should be widely used or backed by a big company. Since this is a cooperate work, all libraries have been available under a license **free for commercial use**. The support for native development will not be taken into account. (2)

Requirements for styling components

On top of the the UI library styling components are necessary. These improve the building speed and provide a consisted layout. The existing layout application is based on Bootstrap version 3. Since the UI will be extended extensively. The requirements for the new report modules are the determining factor. The existing UI has only one view, changing it's layout can be done without much effort. Independently on the chosen UI Styling Component, it's must be used in the complete frontend to provide an consisted User experience (???). Which design language the User Interface is using is at this state of application not important. The main User Experience (UX) requirements are reliability, speed and flexibility to structure and interact on the interface (???). Therefore styling frameworks with a **huge number of components** are required. The dashboard have to react on user input, therefore the framework needs a large part of form components. The components should also be **reactive**, meaning the are designed for user interaction. Instead of static components, they should be able to handle their state by their own . This simplifies the development with the components. On the other hand the framework should be lightweight, for a good interaction speed. A **modular** UI kit can achieve this balancing act. The framework should implement **modern features** like grid breakpoints for Responsive Design and CSS Preprocessor support for SASS or LESS. (???)

Requirements of visualization libraries

While the UI library will handle all user interaction, the actual visualization of the data has to be done by a charting library. For these library counts the same as for the UI library, it has to be free for commercial use. It also should be **independent of the chosen framework** or on a huge amount of other libraries. UI-Frameworks have a short lifecycle (3). This leaves the possibility to switch the UI-Framework at

a further time, without losing all effort brought into the visualization. In general **compatibility** with different UI-Frameworks and devices should be given. To ensure the future compatibility the library should also be evaluated based on its continuous **enrichment and maintenance over time**. An active project ensures also the **documentation** and so the development effort to be expected. Since the data to be analyzed is huge, the library should provide the best **performance** possible, taking a more complicated implementation into account. It should also **support the API format** in which the backend is providing the data. The main goal of this work is to provide a highly customized dashboard for the requirements of the Z performance analysts. Therefore the library should provide a **wide range of visualization** and as much **customization options** as possible to increase the options in the visualization. (???)

5 Evaluation of the application technologies

Data preparation and backend technologies

The existing backend is using a Flask(???) environment on Python for browsing the server's directories and dynamically render the web pages with Jinja2(???). This work aims to extend this application. For reasons of efficiency keeping the existing code basis would be helpful. Nevertheless if based on programming effort or performance a switch of programming language or framework would be necessary, this should be considered. This chapter will discuss benefits of the different possible web backend's and highlight the best choice for this application. Based on the choice of programming language the possibilities for data preparation will be explained.

In extension to the current use scenario of the application will require handling REST calls. The REST interface will be used by the clients to access the rehashed report data (???).

To handle the web requests the backend requires web framework. According to the Web Framework Benchmarks from TechEmpower (???), the existing Python solution is not the fastest environment around. Independently of the test type languages like Go, Scala, Java or C++ are performing better than the Python frameworks. The majority of requests against the web server will be REST requests for the analyzed data. Looking at the TechEmpower benchmarks, the JSON serialization test runs seem to match best our utilization scenario. When only looking at request per seconds data, Java servlets are providing the best results for JSON Serialization with about 560k queries. The best python library is providing 87.5% of the top performance. The best overall results for plaintext queries are providing C and C++ with about 4 million queries. Python reaches only 35.3% of the top score.

The switch to Java or C/C++ would require a huge amount of time to set up the new environment and rewrite the code. Since the application is not meant to be a high-performance application, the extra amount of time satisfies not the benefits. A good compromise between performance and a simple to implement solution could also be Go(73.0%) if performance would get more important (???). Another try to improve performance if it's getting necessary could be to switch to a more performant web framework of python.

When taking a more specific look at python libraries in the TechEmpower benchmark. It's quite clear that Flask is not providing the best performance overall. The best-tested libraries for JSON and Plaintext queries in mid-2017 seem to be falcon (432k /804k) and wheezy.web (377k /956k). An older python

specific benchmark test shows the same tendency (???). Both are not including a template engine for server rendering. If this would be a necessary requirement bottle or weppy are better alternatives. The TechEmpower benchmark is in no sense complete. There are multiple fast and uprising web frameworks (???) like Sanic or Japronto. The latter promises about 1.2 million plaintext queries per second (???), which would be even faster than the fastest frameworks from the TechEmpower benchmarks. But since there are not comparing in the same benchmark it's hard to compare them equally. Either way Flask seems to have only a quarter of the performance that is possible in the Python environment. For further improvements in performance, a switch to the falcon or wheezy.web framework should be considered.

//DO why stay with flask

The current application is written in Python 3 and provides a web application by using Flask. Flask is a slight web framework, which provides a development server and the Jinja2 templating engine. The Flask module enables the application to handle all web requests.

// How is Flask Working

//TODO <https://www.cabotsolutions.com/2017/11/a-detailed-study-of-wsgi-web-server-gateway-interface-of-python>

Despite the fact that python may not be the fastest language (???) to solve this problem it has multiple other advantages. Python is an interpreted language with a simple and readable syntax. According to its author Guido van Rossum, one of the main concern when developing the language was “*to make Python code highly readable*” (???). This goal has been fulfilled as shown in a comparison based on expressiveness (???), where Python is ranking significantly better than most other languages for this use case. Even with the readable language design, the syntax keeps flexible, when leveraging optional object-oriented or functional design patterns. Altogether this minifies the development and debugging time. In terms of efficiency, this is a huge cost saver and makes the application more fault tolerant. On top of that python is great in combining different technologies and languages and provides a comprehensive documenting system with Sphinx (???). (???, ???)

Handling data structures in Python is simple compared to other programming languages (???). This can be done also in other languages which are providing even more libraries for different use cases (???). But Python is providing the most efficient libraries in terms of documentation and flexibility (???). The main libraries that will be used in this application will be Pandas and NumPy for reading and modifying the which is for most of the reports table based. All other work like the visualization of the data will be done on the front end.

To summarize this chapter, there are good alternatives for the backend languages or frameworks. But until the performance of our application is not getting the main concern. The current solution the most efficient way to solve the given problems and develop the application. For the project time frame of 7 weeks, this is equally important and therefore the best tool of choice.

Choose of frontend technology

For further page loading improvements, the source code should be handled by a module bundler. This will minify and optimize the code for production by using transpilers.

//Explain more the frontend technology with article frontend for dinosaurs

// Say something about huge continuous changes in technology <https://blog.logrocket.com/the-increasing-nature-of-frontend-complexity-b73c784c09ae>

//babel and webpack here -> cite

Dynamically updating the Document Object Model (DOM)

Based on the web statistics by W3Tech (???) jQuery is still the most used JavaScript library to modify websites with JavaScript. There are also multiple JavaScript Frameworks, which claim to be the best (3). The main JavaScript-Framework competitors are React, Angular, and Vue.js. Independent of the choice of framework, using such will slow down the page loading as more powerful the framework gets. This means plain or jQuery web pages are faster than a web pages build by a UI framework (???). If a JS framework is required for the building of an report interface, one of these three will be used instead of jQuery or plain JS. Therefore these three will be evaluated in the further comparison. Based on web page usage (???), the GitHub stars (???) and the npm downloads(???) React is beating the other front-end frameworks. But as seen in (???) Vue.js is growing faster and may become the main competitor to React (???), whereas Angular has been beaten in this ranking.

The reason to use the jQuery library instead of plain JS with ECMA5 syntax is that it makes coding faster and easier to understand (???). Anyway adding the jQuery dependency to use only one feature might not be reasonable, since there are always plain JS solutions for a jQuery function (???). This is getting even more enforced, since the latest specifications of JS EMCA6+ and now upcoming EMCA2018 (???) have increase feature set of JS (???). The incompatibility of the newer specifications with an older browser can be overcome by transpilers like babel.

In large projects, however, UI-Frameworks are handling better the complex changes of the DOM. Where jQuery sites are requiring many callbacks and event listener to handle asynchronous code execution, frameworks are providing an interface to change the state of the page. The huge amount of references in the plain JS based web pages makes it harder to understand the code basis.

Evaluated UI- Frameworks

UI frameworks bring new features in the frontend without making the source code unreadable. The web code written with a framework becomes usually more modular and structured. This makes the application components better testable and reusable. The framework makes it possible to navigate between different subsites, without losing the data model or loading a new HTML file. Each framework implements these features slightly different. In the following they will be described shortly.

React describes itself as “a declarative, efficient, and flexible JavaScript library for building user interfaces” (???). The first version was released in 2013, now 16.2.0 (???) is the current version of the library maintained by Facebook. The main characteristic of the library is the reactive approach. This approach means if the state of a component changes React is automatically rerendering the Virtual DOM (???), by using its reconciliation algorithm (???). The Virtual DOM is a virtual representation of the browser views in the memory. Applications written in React are divided by their functionality into components. This means JavaScript is generating the HTML by defining both business logic and HTML markup (???). React used therefore a syntax extension called JSX. Furthermore React is only a core library, it's used in general together with React-Dom for the Virtual DOM in the browser and several other extensions. (???)

Whereas React is backed by Facebook, Google is behind the development of Angular. The first version of Angular (AngularJS) was released in October 2010. A complete has then been done into Angular2 (September 2016), on which all newer Angular Versions are based on. The current version is 5.0.1. In contrast to its competitors, Angular relies on Typescript. Typescript is an extension of JavaScript based on the suggestions for EMCA6 developed by Microsoft (???). The main features static typing and improvements for object orient concepts (???).

Angular has also a strict separation of technology and components. In contrast to React Typescript is used to extend the HTML by creating HTML *templates* with Angularized markup. These templates are managed by *component* classes and the actual application logic is inside the *services*. Together they are boxed in *modules*. Every Angular App has a *bootstrapping* the *root module*, from where on Angular takes over the navigation, presentation and user interaction. This separation of different components follows strictly the model-view-controller pattern. Additionally Angular is providing most functions in its core dependencies and almost predefined workflow for the development. (???)

Vue.js is the youngest of the three frameworks, introducing it's the first version in February 2014 and the current version 2 in 2016. It's not developed by a big company, instead of by a small team of a dozen developers led by Evan You. Even though large companies like Alibaba or Baidu are using it. Vue.js has borrowed most of its concepts from its successors like Angular, react or Ember.js. Like React Vue.js utilizes a virtual DOM and provide reactive and composable view components. But addition it integrates frequently used features like routing and global state management in the core library. In contrast to Angular or React it forces the user not to learn superset of JavaScript, like JSX or Typescript. The top priority of Vue.js is to provide a lightweight and easy to learn library for user views. (???)

Comparison of the UI frameworks

All three libraries have their eligibility for different domains, the evaluation will choose the best match based on the criteria defined in the chapter before. All libraries are using the MIT license, so the k.o. criteria of being used without any license cost are fulfilled. (???, Neuhaus.2017, (4))

In terms of programming speed, Vue.js is the best framework. According to several articles, it has the fastest learning curve, together with a very simple syntax that requires no extra technology like JSX or Typescript. Not so easy to learn but also fast is React since it is only a simple JS library to implement with great flexibility in the workflow. Angular has a harder learning curve since it's very complex, but Typescript (which is also available for React) improves the readability of the code. In large projects, the scalability of the development time is better with more developers.

All libraries are providing a solid documentation to learn the framework.

In point of integration into the application environment, React and Vue.js are equally straightforward. The reason behind this is, that both are only JS libraries, which can easily be imported in normal JS files without the need extra build dependencies like angular is requiring it.

The scalability can only be rated by way of deploying an application. Angular brings its strengths in large Single Page Applications (SPA), because it was build for them (???). Because of the strong enforcement for modularity, large projects are better maintainable and suitable for larger pools of developers. Angular is also easily testable and therefore better scalable. React and Vue.js, on the other hand, can more easily used for microservices, since they require only simple imports of JS libraries. This enables better scaling for large environments. React is even better for microservices since every functional component of React is a single module. Because of the huge amount of libraries React is also better for complex projects.

As shown in the js-framework-benchmark the frameworks cannot compete with the fastest framework available. There compared performance is almost one level. Vue.js is slightly faster, but the benchmark from mid-2017 is also not using the newest versions aka React 16 and Angular 5. Especially in React 16 with React Fiber (???) has made huge performance improvements under the surface. Important for the speed of the initial page loading, can also be the library size. Since Vue.js is the most lightweight it is in general faster, whereas Angular is the slowest one.

React and Angular have the backing of two of the most powerful companies, in financial aspects as well as in their skill in the area. Vue.js, on the other hand, is founded via Patreon even tough it get used by Baidu and Alibaba. Based on the npm downloads React is definitely the most used framework of them three. React is also the most popular one based on the stateofjs survey (???) and the GitHub stars (???). Even though the community of Vue.js is growing faster at the moment.

React is the winner for this comparison based on the huge environment supporting it and it's high popularity. The workflow of React is very flexible so that it is easily integrated into the current appli-

cation environment. Vue.js stands out with a simple and lightweight framework, which would make development, even more, easier than React. Even though its only one of many uprising technologies. Vue.js may success React (???), but at this point of time React seems to be the more safe choice of tool, since it's backed by a big company and the most popular framework. It's also easy to start with and fulfills the necessary requirements. So React is a good choice as the framework for the more complex multipage sites.

<https://medium.com/???>

<https://www.robinwieruch.de/reasons-why-i-moved-from-angular-to-react/>

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Styling the User Interface

The decision on the styling components has no huge effect on the application. The styling components can be changed easily changed and aesthetics are a matter of taste. The main requirements for the styling components are that they can be used with different UI-Frameworks. The support of different UI-Frameworks makes it easier to substitute the underlying UI-Framework layer. The small reports may also only use jQuery or even no library.

If IBM provides a suitable framework for the application this would be the most consistent style component choice. At the moment internal design framework for the internal w3 design is not publicly available. IBM provides only the Carbon Framework (???) used by IBM Cloud. This framework has not been chosen, because it provides not enough form components for the user interaction. According to the GitHub statistics Bootstrap, Semantic-UI, Foundation, Materialize and Material UI are the five most popular UI-Frameworks. The frameworks have equal features in most categories. All are licensed under MIT. Some are more modular and performant than other, but the differences are too slight to make a fundamental distinction. All have a responsive design and can be used together with CSS preprocessors. The Foundation framework has only a few form components and is unsuitable for complex user interaction. There are also implementations of Material Design, Bootstrap and Semantic UI for all common frameworks. This makes the choice for the framework and aesthetic choice. I like the Material Design by Google the most so I choose Material-UI for the React Framework and Materialize for jQuery. (???, ???, ???)

Visualizing the data

Filtering visualization libraries

Despite the user interactions on the dashboard, the data visualization is the main focus of the dashboard. For efficiently creating a huge amount of plots for different views and datasets the use of a library cannot be avoided. There are many visualization libraries for JS. To get a glue of the numbers, GitHub is listing about 850 JavaScript projects (07.02.2018) under the term visualization (??). This chapter can focus only on a subset of the available libraries. Since this work relies on some mandatory requirements, libraries which not match the following criteria will not be considered. The library must be open source and **free for commercial use**. This disallows libraries like Highcharts, FusionCharts, and ZingChart. Since the analyzed data is confidential, the visualization has to be done **locally** without leaving the Intranet. This prohibits API solutions like Google Charts even if there are free or commercial use. To leave the possibility open to switching the UI framework, the visualization library should not be **dependent on frameworks** ones like Ember Charts, Victory, ReCharts or jqPlot. The reports are requiring a huge amount of different charts which should ideally implement with only one library unless there is a special use case which requires a special library. Therefore specialized libraries like Timesheet.js, VivaGraph, Sigma.js, Leaflet or heatmap.js are unsuitable. Only charting libraries are considered.

The focus report of this report is not a complete comparison of all JS charting libraries. Only the most important libraries will be evaluated. The distinction is done by GitHub star ranking and npm download statistics. Only projects with over 1k stars and npm downloads per day will be considered. This condition limits the list to D3.js, Chart.js, C3, Raphael, NVD3, Chartist, ECharts, plotly.js, Vega, Vega-Lite and Vis.js (??). In both rankings, D3.js and Chart.js are completely outstanding. D3 is complete outstanding by even doubling both numbers of Chart.js. In the further course of the chapter, the 10 different libraries will be shortly introduced with their main features and then compared based on the criteria defined in chapter XY.

Introduction of possible visualization libraries

The most popular library for data visualization is D3.js (5) also known as D3 or Data Driven Documents. The library is based on Protovis and has 2 actively maintained versions v3 and v4. This evaluation will refer to the newer (and better) version (??). One of the reasons for the popularity is the flexibility of D3 (??). It is able to manipulate the DOM and integrates the existing web technologies, like Scalable Vector Graphics (SVG) and Canvas to create the visualizations. The library can be used for any visualization project, because of its BSD 3-Clause, which allows commercial use as well. Using D3 for different projects becomes even easier since D3 has a comprehensive API documentation (??) and an own platform for example visualizations with Bl.ocks (??). If some kind of visualization not supported there

is a high change a plugin to solve this is already written, This list is proving an overview about the D3 plugins [?]. The visualization by D3 itself is fast and D3 can handle huge amounts of data compared to other libraries. The actual speed of the rendering performance depends on the underlying technology. Canvas is much faster the SVG graphics as shown in this performance benchmark (???)

Many visualization libraries are using d3 and abstracting its complexity and low-level interface to an easier to use interface. From the current selection C3, NVD3, plotly.js, Vega and Vega-Lite are based on D3. Each of the four libraries has different levels of abstraction (???)

NVD3.js has the highest level of abstraction of the four. The library is developed by Novus Partners and distributed with the Apache 2.0 license. The syntax is close to the original d3 library but only rudimental documented and with a few possibilities. The library supports also only the basic types of diagrams: bar, bullet, line and pie charts. Each of the charts is provisioned with animations.

C3 indifference has a more extensive visualization API. The library is developed since 2013 by Masayuki Tanaka under MIT license. The visualization for C3 is done by a model definition in JSON. Compared to NVD3 it has less visual effects. The API parameter, on the other hand, are highly customizable and well documented. In contrast to NVD3, there is also no more coding in d3 required. This makes it a lot easier to use but, loses also the customization possibilities of d3.

Another D3 based library is called plotly.js. It's the JavaScript implementation of the declarative Plotly API. The visualization description exists for Python, Matlab, and R and is developed and distributed by the Plotly Inc. under MIT license. The framework is built on top of d3.js and stack.gl and provides over 20 different chart types. The documentation side provides an extensive API description together with many examples.

Like C3 or plotly.js, Vega (???) and Vega-Lite (???) are also declarative visualization languages based on a JSON syntax. The languages are build by the Stanford Visualization Group, now called the University of Washington Interactive Data Lab. The same group that developed D3. Vega is not intended as a replacement for D3 (???) . Like D3 there are both licensed under the BSD-3 clause. D3 is meant to be a low-level visualization framework, whereas Vega provides an abstract layer for representing and reasoning visualizations. The idea behind the project is to “promote an ecosystem of usable and interoperable tools, supporting use cases ranging from exploratory data analysis to effective communication via custom visualization design”. The abstraction layer has also various improvements for Browser compatibility since there are translated in runtime to D3 code based on the environment. Vega-Lite is based on Vega and provides a higher level grammar to enable fast specification of interactive data visualizations. Both libraries provide an enormous amount of different charts and a very extensive documentation.

The main competitor of D3 according to usage stats is Chart.js. Like C3 or Vega, the charts are described with a JSON Model. The library supports 8 highly customizable chart types, which cover almost all use cases. Chart.js provides multiple examples for these charts and the API is well documented. Chart.js is actively maintained by seven different developers and published as Open Source with an MIT license.

Chart.js has good plotting performance using HTML5 Canvas. It also supports responsive rerendering. Like D3 it also can be extended by plugins.

Raphael is a lightweight library for drawing vector graphics. It is developed by Dmitry Baranovskiy under MIT license. In contrast to the other libraries, its oldest release is a bit older than a year. The library is easy to use for visualizations, but it is not scoped for charts. This makes plotting charts harder to implement than in D3. Especially for older devices or a great compatibility Raphael is a good choice because of its unique support of the Vector Markup Language (VML), SVG and Canvas objects.

Chartist is a lightweight charting library for customizable responsive charts. Gion Kunz is the main developer of the library and licensed it under MIT. Chartist can create three different kinds of plots bar, pie and line charts. They are plotted into SVG and can be animated with the Synchronized Multimedia Integration Language (SMIL). To implement the charts, Chartist.js provides detailed examples and an API documentation. Chartist is also extendable by plugins.

The vis.js visualization library (???) initially developed by Almende B.V. and dual licensed under both Apache 2.0 and MIT. The library designed to be easily usable and to handle large amounts of dynamic data. The library consists of five main components: DataSet, Graph2d, Graph3d, Network, Timeline. For the use case important is the Graph2d component which plots data into bar or line charts. Pie charts are not possible which makes the library unsuitable for the visualizations purpose.

ECharts is a powerful charting library developed and maintained by Baidu. ECharts provides a large number of possible visualizations in two and three dimensional. The library is based on zrender, which uses Canvas for the plotting, but ECharts is also available as a WebGL version. It can also be integrated with several UI Frameworks or GIS applications and has implementations in many other programming languages. The JavaScript implementation is licensed under BSD 3-Clause. The website provides many complex visualization implementations. The API is documented in English and Chinese, even though the main language in almost all user forums is Chinese.

Decision on the best visualization library

The previous chapter has given a short overview about the most popular JavaScript visualization libraries. This has only a small subset fitting for the visualization requirements. The decision on the visualization depends mainly on the balancing between simplicity and performance of the implementation. If simplicity is more important Vega or even Vega-Lite would be the considerable choice, otherwise if performance and maximal customization is important D3 is the best choice. In the following the decision on D3 will be explained on the establish criteria.

The library should be compatible with a wide range of devices. This is the case for all libraries, but in general the more high-level framework s, like Vega are a bit more optimized in this criteria. The best compatibility has Raphael. This is based on the support for old browsers by VML.

On the other hand an chart implementation with Raphael would be very hard, Vega-Lite is providing here the best compromise between implantation speed and features.

Nevertheless the best feature set can only be reached with complex low-level visualization framework. Besides the performance this is the most important feature. The most feature rich libraries are D3 and ECharts. But the problem with ECharts is that help for problem is only available in Chinese language, where as D3 has an even larger English community. Because of the huge user base, there are endless example implementations for D3. D3 is also highly customizable and provides almost any kind of chart ether natively or with a plugin. Additionally it has also a great performance for a huge amount of data, which makes D3 the perfect choice. (???, ???)

6 Implementation of the Dashboard

This chapter will present an implementation overview based on the architecture and technology decisions presented before. In the first part the architecture will be explained in detail. The second part will present the key implementation in the back and frontend. The implementation samples for the frontend will cover the REST API and the data pre-processing. The samples for the frontend will cover the graph plotting with D3, the visualisation of graphviz files and the page routing with react.

Dashboard architecture

The application is designed with a two-tier client-server architecture (S, 43ff, ???). The advantage of this implementation ...

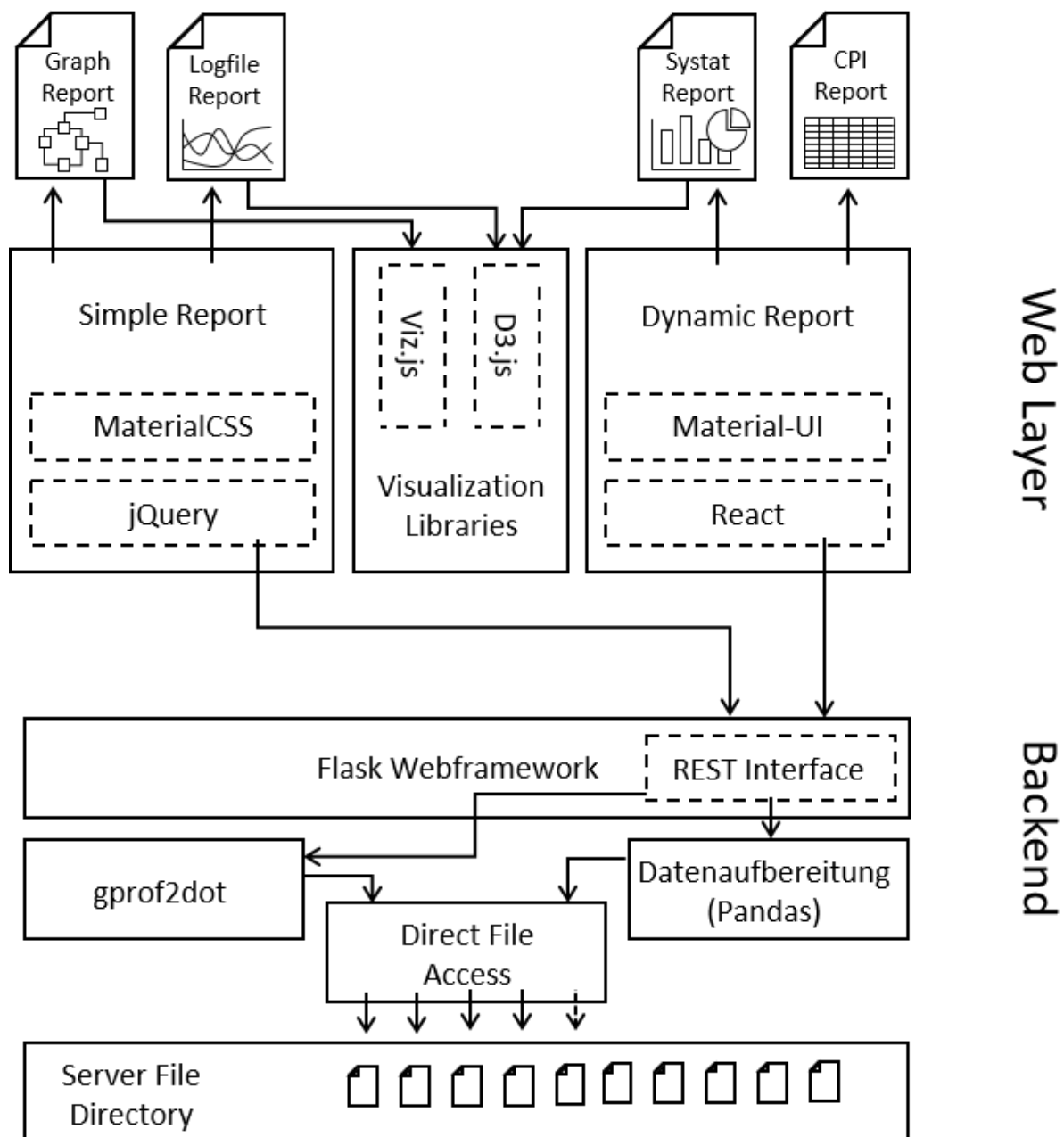


Figure 6.1: Dashboard Architecture Overview

Application Frontend

<https://hackernoon.com/a-map-to-modern-javascript-development-2017-16d9eb86309c>

<https://medium.freecodecamp.org/a-study-plan-to-cure-javascript-fatigue-8ad3a54f2eb1>

At this point, the application is able to visualize four different kinds of test files. The application visualizes the different parts of a *sysstat* report file in the *sarcsv* or *sartxt* format. It is also able to interpret the outputs of different profiling tools like *gprof* or *perf* by using the *gprof2dot* script. The resulting dot files are then shown at the web interface. Additionally, the tool is able to visualize two other internally used file formats. It is interpreting log files of the ML tests and so-called pureports, which are reports for processing units.

Every kind of reports is an independent module of the application. Therefore the separate reports don't have to be written using the same technologies. For the presented visualizations this means that for the complex or dynamic changing reports the React library is used for the DOM manipulation. Whereas static reports are using the only jQuery for DOM manipulations.

On the way of work, several CSS Frameworks for Material Design have been tested. For static reports, MaterializeCSS has been chosen over Material Design Lite. For React based reports Material-UI has is used. A detailed argumentation for these decisions has been done in chapters 4.

The main work effort in the frontend has been brought in the plots. A report type can have multiple datasets, each of them is presented in an own view. This view contains custom-designed plots visualised using the D3.js library. D3.js is the library of choice because it provides the highest scale of customization. More therefor in chapter 5 and 6.

Viz.js is handling the graphviz-files (dot) representation for the web. The dot files can also be slightly manipulated by some custom JS functions in the frontend.

The data for the D3 plots and the other interfaces are provided by a REST interface. The REST interface is part of the Python project which holds the complete backend logic.

Application Backend

The decision on python as backend has several reasons discussed in the chapter XY. This decision has been taken because the previous application was written in Python 3. 6 and the prototyping in python is very fast for our use case. Python provides a lot efficient libraries around data science and it has a simple and readable syntax.

The project has several dependencies. All web request is handled by Flask, the REST interface as well as the rendering and the provision of the web pages. The web provisioning part of the application has also been extended about new routing rules for each report. Each report view needs one or more REST requests. This is because only the data, that's actually required should be sent to the client. Each REST Call is bind to a function for the data preparation. Often the panda's library is used for that since the majority of the data is tabular data. But there are also a lot of other transformation, like separating the different datasets in a report or finding matching lines in the ML-log files.

Dashboard Implementation

The second part will present the key implementation in the back and frondend. The implementation samples for the frondend will cover the REST API and the data pre-proccessing. The samples for the frondend will cover the graph plotting with D3, the visualisation of graphviz files and the page routing with react.

Implementation of the backend engine

Data preprocessing in Python 3

REST implementation with Flask

Implementation of visualisation and user interface

Page routing with React v16

Visualisation of Graphviz files

Data plotting with D3.js v4

7 Conclusions and future work

::: What have been the requirements :::::

Time

::: Architecture conclusion :::::

Client Server Application

::: Technology conclusion :::::

Best web framework = Flask, because is already used -> consider switching the web framework in python to wheezy or falcon

speak about Python vs. Go...???

Best UI-Framework -> react, vue may be a competitor

CSS Styling not important

Best Visualisation Framework -> D3

::: Implementation conclusion :::::

- four reports, with difernet coverage and aspects -> further work have to be done -> more reports, more plots -> ...

::: Furthure Work :::::

live stream data, while the report is running

single sign on ibm

berichte verbinden

:::::::::::::

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