Advanced Software Testing
Applying Decision Tables to Business Logic
Advanced Software Testing

- A series of webinars excerpted from *Advanced Software Testing: Volume 1*, a book for test analysts and test engineers
- Equivalence partitioning and boundary value analysis are useful for testing input field validation
- Three additional techniques are handier and more powerful for business logic
  - Decision tables
  - State based testing
  - Use cases
- This first webinar covers the related concepts of decision tables and cause-effect graphs
**Decision Tables**

- Concept: test the rules that govern handling of transactional situations
- Model: table (or Boolean graph) connecting conditions with actions
- Test derivation: fulfill conditions, check actions
- Coverage criteria: at least one test per combination of conditions (DT column)
- Bug hypothesis: improper action or missing action
**Example: Decision Table (Full)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conditions</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>11</th>
<th>12</th>
<th>13</th>
<th>14</th>
<th>15</th>
<th>16</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Real account?</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active account?</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within limit?</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location okay?</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approve?</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Call cardholder?</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Call vendor?</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Example: Deriving Tests

- In the example just shown, each column of the table is a test case
  - We will create the conditions (which are the test’s inputs)
  - We will verify the actions (which are the test’s expected results)
- In some cases, we might generate more than one test case per column (more later)
- In this case, some of the test cases don’t make much sense; e.g.:
  - Account not real but account active?
  - Account not real but account within limit?
- Maybe we don’t need all the columns in our decision table?
Collapsing a Decision Table

- If the value of one or more particular conditions can’t affect the actions for two or more combinations of conditions, we can collapse the decision table.
- This involves combining two or more columns:
  - Combinable columns often **but not always** next to each other.
  - Look for two or more columns that result in the same combination of actions (for all the actions in the table).
  - Replace the conditions that are different in those columns with “-” (for don’t care/doesn’t matter/can’t happen).
- Repeat this process until no further columns share the same combination of actions or where collapse would erase an important distinction.
- Be careful with tables that have non-exclusive rules.
### Example: Decision Table (Collapsed)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conditions</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Real account?</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active account?</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within limit?</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location okay?</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approve?</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Call cardholder?</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Call vendor?</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Column numbers retained for ease of reference to full table

Study carefully to understand why rule 4 could collapse into rule 3, but not rule 3 into rule 2

The same logic also applies to rule 8 collapsing into rule 7, but not rule 7 into rule 6

Formula for number of columns (2 conditions) no longer applies

Regular pattern of conditions no longer applies
Converting to/from a Cause-Effect Graph

Table to graph
- List all the conditions on left of a blank page
- List all the actions on right of a blank page
- Read the table to identify how combinations of conditions cause an action
- Connect one or more conditions with each action using Boolean operators
- Repeat for all actions

Graph to table
- List all the conditions on the top left of decision table
- List all the actions on the bottom left of decision table
- Generate all possible combinations of conditions
- Determine actions taken/not taken for each combination using graph
- Collapse when complete if desired
Example: Cause-Effect Graph

Real account

Active account

Within limit

Location okay

Limit or location bad

Approve

Call Vendor

Call Card holder

Legend

A → B
A causes E

A → B
Not A causes E

A1 → B
A1 or A2 causes E

A2 → B
A1 and A2 causes E
### Equivalence Partitions and Decision Tables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conditions</th>
<th>9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Real account?</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active account?</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within limit?</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location okay?</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To find interesting tests for this column, apply equivalence partitioning:

- Card number and cardholder mismatch
- Card number and expiry mismatch
- Card number and CSC mismatch
- Two of the above mismatches (three possibilities)
- All three mismatches

So, there could be seven tests for that column.
Boundary Values and Decision Tables

To find interesting tests for within limit, apply boundary value analysis:

- The account starts at zero balance
- The account would be at a normal balance after transaction
- The account would be exactly at the limit after the transaction
- The account would be exactly over the limit after the transaction
- The account was at exactly the limit before the transaction
- The account would be at the maximum overlimit value after the transaction

So, there would be four within-limit tests and three over-limit tests
Example: Non-exclusive Rules

- Sometimes more than one rule can apply to a transaction
- This complicates testing somewhat
- First, test each by itself, with no conditions not related to that rule met
- Next, consider testing combinations
  - Avoid combinatorial explosions
  - Use risk to weight combinations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conditions</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foreign exchange?</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balance forward?</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Late payment?</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actions</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exchange fee?</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charge interest?</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charge late fee?</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conclusion

- We’ve seen how to apply decision tables and cause effect graphs to testing
- Useful for sophisticated and complex internal business logic in applications
- Decision tables are a great way to test detailed business rules in isolation, especially for transactional types of situations
- In the next two webinars, we’ll look at two additional techniques, use cases and state-based test techniques
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Address: RBCS, Inc.
31520 Beck Road
Bulverde, TX 78163-3911
USA

Phone: +1 (830) 438-4830
E-mail: info@rbcs-us.com
Web: www.rbcs-us.com