Volume XXVII 2024
ISSUE no.2
MBNA Publishing House Constanta 2024

Scientific Bulletin of Naval Academy

SBNA PAPER • OPEN ACCESS

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To cite this article: Anca Atodiresei, Elena Băutu and Andrei Băutu, Scientific Bulletin of Naval Academy, Vol. XXVII 2024, pg. 214-219

Submitted: 29.03.2024
Revised: 28.11.2024
Accepted: 05.12.2024

Available online at www.anmb.ro

ISSN: 2392-8956; ISSN-L: 1454-864X

doi: 10.21279/1454-864X-24-I2-025
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C4 Modeling for Web Software Development in Maritime Applications

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Abstract. This paper examines the use of the C4 model for designing web-based software solutions tailored to the needs of the maritime industry. Through hierarchical diagrams that represent system structure and interdependencies, this model aids software engineers in making design decisions transparent, thereby supporting team collaboration. We also provide practical insights and best practices for applying C4 modeling to maritime software projects.

1. Introduction

The maritime industry operates at the crossroads of age-old practices and cutting-edge technology, balancing traditional operations with a surge in digital transformation aimed at improving safety, sustainability, and efficiency. With the demand for versatile, scalable web-based solutions growing, the industry increasingly depends on software that can streamline operations and offer stakeholders data in real-time for decision-making and proactive risk mitigation.

Creating these specialized software solutions presents several challenges, such as ensuring compatibility across various maritime systems and maintaining robustness in challenging environmental conditions. To address these needs, a systematic approach to software architecture design is essential—one that considers scalability, flexibility, and specific domain needs.

The C4 model, developed by Simon Brown [1], offers a structured methodology for visualizing software architecture through four layers: Context, Containers, Components, and Code. This hierarchical approach enables software engineers to illustrate design decisions clearly, supporting collaboration among development teams and alignment with business goals.

This article explores the application of the C4 model in designing web software solutions for maritime applications. Drawing upon practical examples and best practices, we discuss how the C4 model can be leveraged to address the unique challenges of the maritime industry, including interoperability, resilience, and regulatory compliance. Furthermore, we discuss considerations for incorporating domain-specific concepts and constraints into the C4 model, ensuring that the resulting software solutions are both technically robust and operationally viable.

Through this exploration, we aim to provide software engineers and architects in the maritime domain with actionable insights and guidance for adopting the C4 model in their projects. By embracing a systematic and collaborative approach to software architecture design, we can unlock the full potential of web software solutions to drive innovation and transformation in the maritime industry.

The following section presents generic information about the requirements and challenges of the maritime domain and the main parts of the C4 model. Section 3 introduces the application of the C4 model in designing web software solutions for maritime applications. Section 4 presents the benefits of using the C4 model in maritime software projects. Section 5 outlines some best practices and considerations for effectively utilizing the C4 model in the context of maritime software development.

2. Background

The maritime industry, often deemed the backbone of global trade, includes diverse activities such as shipping, logistics, offshore operations, and port management. As the volume of goods moved by sea continues to rise, innovative solutions are sought to enhance efficiency, safety, and sustainability [2][3][4].

Web-based software solutions are pivotal to this transformation, offering tools for real-time data analysis, remote monitoring, predictive maintenance, and collaboration. Such tools help optimize vessel operations, cargo management, and supply chain processes.

Understanding maritime's unique requirements is crucial for software design, as these include:

- **Interoperability**: With systems composed of different components from multiple providers, achieving smooth integration and data sharing is essential for operational transparency.
- **Resilience**: Maritime operations face environmental hazards such as extreme weather and saltwater corrosion. Software must be resilient enough to maintain functionality and data accuracy despite these challenges.
- **Regulatory Compliance**: Maritime activities are regulated heavily, with safety, security, environmental, and labor standards. Software solutions must not only comply but also support easy auditing and reporting [5].

The C4 model provides a structured approach to addressing these challenges through effective software architecture design. The model comprises four hierarchical levels [6]:

1. **Context**: Describes the system's high-level objectives, stakeholders, and external dependencies.
2. **Containers**: Identifies the major runtime components of the system and their interactions.
3. **Components**: Details the internal components and their relationships within each container.
4. **Code**: Focuses on the implementation details of individual components.

By applying the C4 model, software engineers can visualize the architecture of maritime software solutions, identify potential bottlenecks, and make informed design decisions [7]. The hierarchical nature of the model facilitates communication among development teams, stakeholders, and domain experts, fostering collaboration and alignment of objectives.

3. Application of C4 Modeling in Maritime Software Development

The application of the C4 model in maritime software development offers a structured approach to designing scalable, resilient, secure [2], and interoperable solutions tailored to the unique requirements of the maritime industry. In this section, we explore how each level of the C4 model can be applied in the context of maritime software projects.

1. **Context Level**: At this level, the focus is on understanding the high-level objectives, stakeholders, and external dependencies of the maritime software system. This involves identifying key actors such as ship operators, port authorities, regulatory bodies, and maritime service providers. By capturing the context of the system, software architects can ensure alignment with business goals and regulatory requirements.

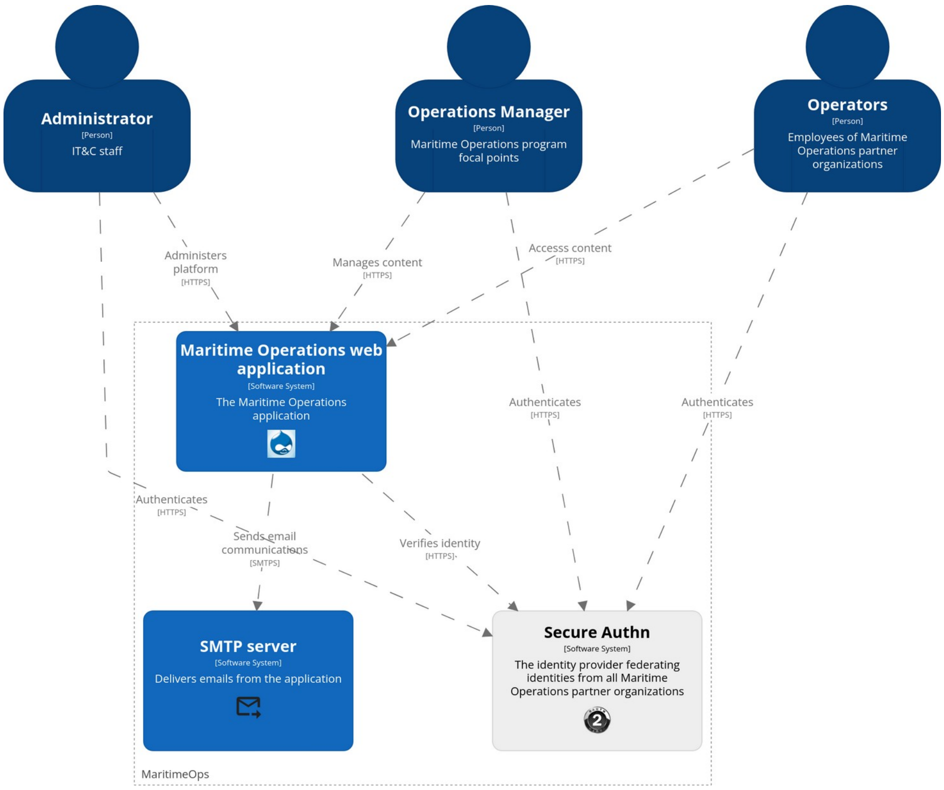

Figure 1. An example of a context diagram presenting stakeholders and external dependencies of an maritime software system

2. **Containers Level**: The containers level of the C4 model identifies the major runtime components of the maritime software system and their interactions. In the context of maritime applications, containers may include onboard systems, shore-based infrastructure, cloud services, and third-party integrations. By defining the boundaries and responsibilities of each container, software architects can achieve modularity, scalability, and fault isolation.

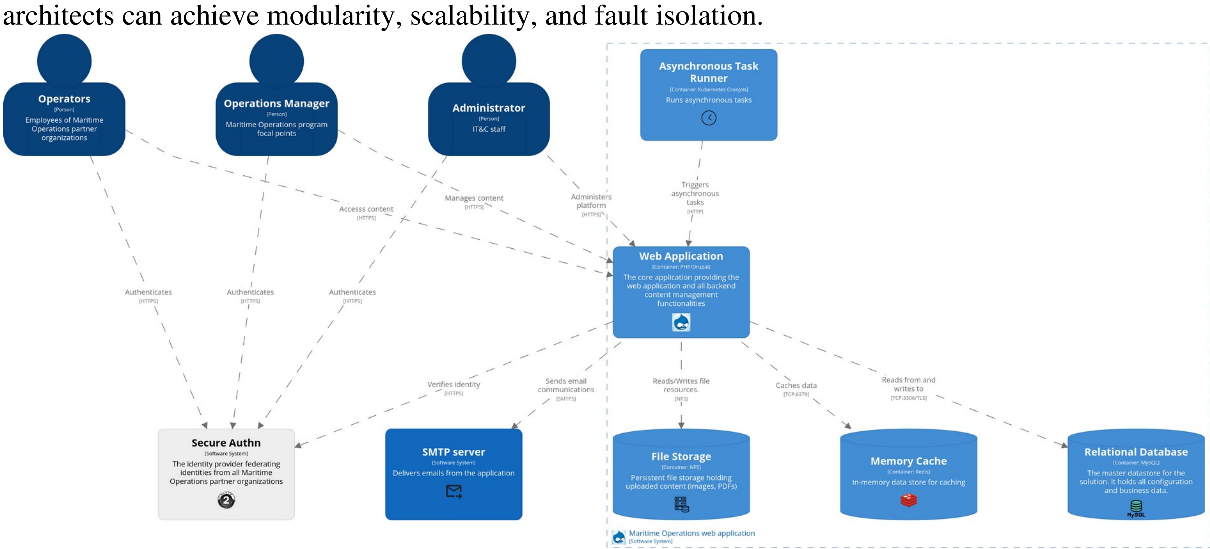

Figure 2. An example of a container diagram presenting major components of an maritime software system and their interactions

3. **Components Level**: At the components level, the focus shifts to the internal components of each container and their relationships. In maritime software development, components may include

modules for vessel tracking, cargo management, route optimization, weather forecasting, and regulatory compliance. By decomposing the system into smaller, cohesive units, software architects can facilitate reuse, maintainability, and testability.

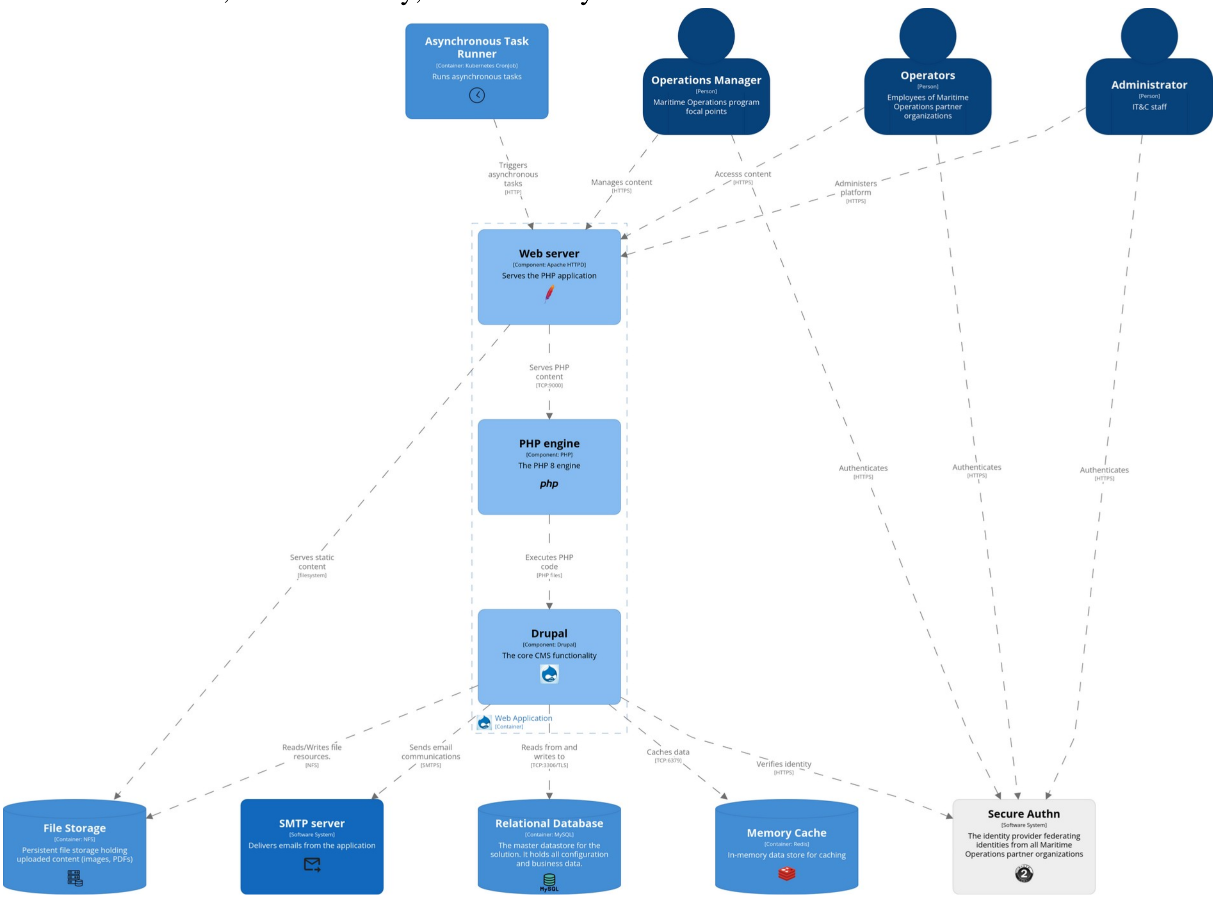

Figure 3. An example of a component diagram presenting internal components of an container and their relationships

4. **Code Level**: The code level of the C4 model focuses on implementation details of individual components, including classes, functions, and data structures. While this level may not always be explicitly represented in architectural diagrams, it plays a crucial role in ensuring the integrity and performance of the software system. In the context of maritime applications, code-level considerations may include platform compatibility, resource efficiency, and real-time processing.

By applying the C4 model at each level, software architects can gain a holistic understanding of the maritime software system and its dependencies. This enables them to make informed design decisions, anticipate potential challenges, and iterate rapidly in response to changing requirements. Furthermore, the hierarchical nature of the C4 model facilitates communication and collaboration among development teams, stakeholders, and domain experts, thereby leading to a shared understanding of the system architecture.

4. Benefits of C4 Modeling in Maritime Software Projects

The application of the C4 model in maritime software projects offers several benefits, ranging from improved communication and collaboration to enhanced scalability and maintainability. In this section, we highlight some of the key advantages of using the C4 model in the context of maritime software development.

- **Improved Communication**: The C4 model's structure provides a unified language for explaining architectural concepts, making it easier for teams, stakeholders, and domain experts to communicate and align objectives.
- **Enhanced Collaboration**: By visualizing the architecture at various levels, the model facilitates cross-team discussions, encouraging collaboration and stakeholder feedback for more comprehensive solutions.
- **Scalability**: With its modular approach, the C4 model supports efficient scaling as requirements and demands evolve. Defining boundaries between cohesive units helps streamline parallel development, deployment, and maintenance.
- **Maintainability**: The C4 model advocates for clean separation and modular design principles. With well-defined components, it's easier to isolate changes, minimize downstream effects, and support code reuse and refactoring.
- **Alignment with Business Goals**: By capturing the context of the maritime software system at the highest level of the C4 model, software architects can ensure alignment with business goals, regulatory requirements, and industry standards. This enables stakeholders to make informed decisions about resource allocation, risk management, and strategic planning, ultimately driving the success and sustainability of maritime software projects.

In summary, the adoption of the C4 model in maritime software projects offers a range of benefits, including improved communication, facilitated collaboration, scalability, maintainability, and alignment with business goals. By leveraging these advantages, software architects can design resilient, interoperable, and future-proof solutions that meet the evolving needs of the maritime industry.

5. Best Practices and Considerations

While applying the C4 model in maritime software projects offers numerous benefits, it's essential to consider best practices and potential challenges to ensure successful implementation.

First, it is important to start with a comprehensive understanding of the system's high-level objectives, stakeholders, and external dependencies to establish a solid foundation. This initial context setting aligns architectural decisions with strategic goals and regulatory requirements.

Furthermore, architectural design is an iterative process, necessitating gradual refinement based on feedback and evolving requirements. Employing lightweight tools and techniques facilitates this iterative approach, enabling rapid experimentation and adjustment.

Design decisions should emphasize modularity and encapsulation within component and container to promote code reuse, maintainability, and scalability. Clear delineation of cohesive units of functionality with well-defined boundaries facilitates these architectural goals.

Domain-specific constraints, such as compliance with maritime regulations and integration with legacy systems, must be carefully considered during system design. Incorporating these constraints ensures that the resulting software solution meets industry-specific requirements.

Documentation and communication are integral throughout the software development lifecycle. C4 model diagrams serve as valuable documentation tools, facilitating shared understanding and alignment of objectives among stakeholders.

Addressing non-functional requirements, including performance, security, reliability, and usability, is paramount. These requirements must be incorporated into the architecture design and validated through appropriate testing and analysis.

Establishing traceability between architectural decisions and business goals, requirements, and constraints promotes accountability and transparency. This traceability enables stakeholders to comprehend the rationale behind architectural choices.

Lastly, fostering cross-functional collaboration among development teams, stakeholders, and domain experts is essential. Open communication, knowledge sharing, and diverse perspectives ensure the resulting solution meets the diverse needs of the maritime industry.

By adhering to these best practices and considerations, software architects can effectively utilize the C4 model to design resilient, scalable, and maintainable maritime software solutions that align with industry standards and requirements.

6. Conclusion

As the maritime industry continues to embrace digital transformation, the importance of web software solutions cannot be overstated. The application of the C4 model in maritime software development offers a structured and systematic approach to designing scalable, resilient, and interoperable solutions tailored to the unique requirements of the maritime industry.

The C4 model provides a powerful framework for designing maritime software solutions that are not only technically robust but also operationally viable. By embracing this approach, the maritime industry can unlock new opportunities for innovation, efficiency, and sustainability in an increasingly interconnected and digital world.

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