The Software Documentor Mindset

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The Problem

- Software documentation is very important especially with more and more technologies always being released
- However, it's a very time costly undertaking
- Then why and how do people voluntarily contribute software documentation online?

The Idea

- A 5 part study
  - Direct invite of documentors from GitHub, Youtube, and WriteTheDocs (a documentation centric community) based on expertise and experience
  - A semi-structured interview discussing documentation journey and creative process
  - Qualitative analysis of the interviews
  - Synthesis of mindsets based on the qualitative analysis results
  - Validation questionnaire for the interviewees to validate the mindsets and provide further feedback
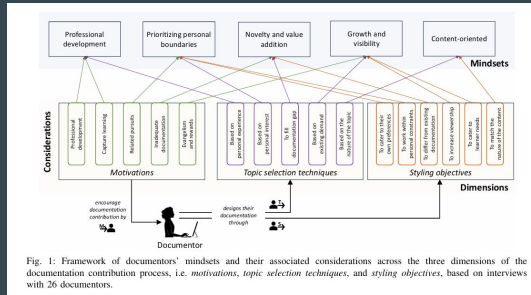

The Considerations

- The qualitative interviews revealed three dimensions of consideration
  - 5 main motivations: professional development, capture learning, related pursuits, inadequate current documentation, evangelism and rewards
  - 5 topic selection techniques: personal experience, personal interest, fill a gap, existing demand, nature of the topic
  - 6 styling objectives: own preferences, working with personal constraints, differ from existing documentation, increase viewership, cater to learner needs, match nature of the content

The Mindsets

- Authors found related themes amongst different considerations and formed 5 mindsets
  - Personal Development
  - Prioritizing Personal Boundaries
  - Novelty and Value Add
  - Growth and Visibility
  - Content-Oriented

Fig. 1: Framework of documentors' mindsets and their associated considerations across the three dimensions of the documentation contribution process, i.e. *motivations*, *topic selection techniques*, and *styling objectives*, based on interviews with 26 documentors.

Validation and Discussion

- Mindsets discovered were neither exhaustive nor mutually exclusive
  - In the validation questionnaire multiple mindsets were reported and new mindsets were also reported by respondents
- Many documentors discussed difficulties pursuing considerations
  - This also included strategies to mitigate these difficulties
  - E.x. a video creator focuses on Growth and Mindset but it can be difficult to understand their audience. As such they use online metrics to try and understand better
- Context of stakeholders was also discussed by respondents
  - E.x. Creating for colleagues in a work environment vs general end users results in different documentation

👍Positives

- The topic I find interesting
  - It's not something many would consider in that differences in documentation can be attributed to several archetypes of mindsets as defined by motivation, topic, and style
- The validation questionnaire
  - This provided validation that the findings were reasonable
  - Also provided feedback and further discussion on the results as well as further avenues of research
- Variety of platforms
  - Interviewing contributors from Youtube, Github, and WriteTheDocs brings in significantly different viewpoints given the nature of the content on the different platforms

👎Negatives

- Narrow Scope
  - Only 26 respondents. A reasonable trade-off given the usage of interview. However it is still further diluted by platform, experience in programming and documentation, as well as technologies covered
- Gaps in mindsets
  - As noted, they are not exhaustive as such reported mindsets may not fit into their categories
  - Furthermore, in the validation questionnaire the mindsets were intentionally given vague definitions but this caused further issues in gaps between reported mindsets and those provided

🔮 Future Works

- How fragmented is documentation
  - Given the motivation of "inadequate current documentation" and even this study covering 3 platforms it is apparent that there are many different places to look for documentation and that it can be difficult
  - Personal experience also speaks to this
- Correlation between platforms and mindsets
  - There is a notable lack of quantitative results in this paper
  - One would expect that certain platforms lend themselves well to certain mindsets
    - E.x. Youtube, a social media platform, would be more likely to have Growth and Visibility mindset documentors

Rating

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I find the topic interesting and results seem to support previous works.

Little supporting evidence, especially due to smaller scope

Results could be used as a foundation for future research

Discussion Points

- What is your experience when looking for documentation to answer a question?
  - Does your process change depending on the question?

- Is it feasible to have a central documentation repository by technology as to streamline the search process?
  - How could it handle official documentation vs community made?

- Do you think that the mindset categories would change significantly depending on what population of people are asked?
  - In another way, are many of these mindsets only relevant because they asked volunteers?