

P. Runeson, and C. Wohlin, "Statistical Usage Testing for Software Reliability Certification and Control", Proceedings 1st European International Conference on Software Testing, Analysis and Review, pp. 309-323, London, UK, 1993.

## Statistical Usage Testing for Software Reliability Certification and Control

Per Runeson and Claes Wohlin

Q-Labs  
IDEON Research Park  
S-223 70 LUND  
SWEDEN  
Phone: +46-46 18 29 80  
Fax: +46-46 15 28 80  
e-mail: pr@q-labs.se

Department of Communication Sys-  
tems, Lund University  
Box 118, S-221 00 LUND  
SWEDEN  
Phone: +46-46 10 33 29  
Fax: +46-46 14 58 23  
e-mail: claesw@tts.lth.se

### *Abstract*

Software reliability is a frequently used term, but very seldom the reliability is under control during a software development project. This paper presents a method, Statistical Usage Testing (SUT), which gives the possibility to estimate and predict, and hence control the software reliability. SUT is the reliability certification method described as a part of Cleanroom software engineering. The main objective of SUT is to certify the software reliability and to find the faults with high influence on the reliability. SUT provides statistically based stopping rules during test as well as an effective use of test resources, which is shown by practical application of this and similar methods. This paper presents the basic ideas behind SUT and briefly discusses the theoretical basis as well as the application of the method.

Topic Descriptors: Statistical Usage Testing, Software Reliability, Certification, Usage Profile, Operational Profile.

# 1. Introduction

The software development community is not in control of the software reliability. This can be stated based on a quote from Tom DeMarco, [DeMarco82]: “You can’t control what you can’t measure”. It is not possible based on traditional development techniques to actually measure the software reliability hence the reliability is out of control.

Software reliability engineering is currently a fast growing area. Therefore the situation is not hopeless; the techniques are becoming available to control the reliability. The software process will become more and more controlled which means that methods to estimate, predict and certify the fault content and reliability will be introduced. This is the only way towards managing the process of actually engineering reliable software, instead of crafting unreliable software.

The testing techniques normally applied are aimed at finding faults. This is a devastating point of view since it implicitly accepts that errors are made and that the testers have to remove them. This reasoning may be philosophical, but it is believed to be one of the key issues in controlling the software reliability. One of the most important aspects in the development is the motivation and belief in being able to do something, in this case develop software with few or no defects. Therefore it is essential to provide techniques so that the software developers can believe in developing zero-defect software, which also includes methods to certify the actual reliability level.

Cleanroom Software Engineering [Mills87, Mills88, Cobb90, Dyer92] emphasizes the intellectual control in the software development. Cleanroom is a collection of several sound management and engineering techniques, in particular it is emphasized that it is possible to develop nearly zero-defect software. One of the engineering techniques emphasized in Cleanroom is Statistical Usage Testing, [Whittaker92], which is a method for statistical control of the software reliability during the system or acceptance testing phase. The requirement on the testing phase is that it resembles the operational phase to be able to apply the techniques to actually remove failures most critical for the user and certify a particular reliability level.

The objective with Statistical Usage Testing is not as in traditional testing to remove faults, but to certify a specific predetermined reliability level. Statistical Usage Testing and its opportunities to promote statistical control of the software reliability will be discussed in this paper. The usage testing technique will provide a basis to certify a reliability requirement, see section 2. The method for reliability certification provides an opportunity to formulate a stopping criterion for the testing, where the criterion is based on the fulfilment of the requirement. The objective of the testing technique is to remove the faults which affect the reliability the most first. This objective also means that the test cost is minimized as well as the losses during operation due to that the most critical failures in terms of usage are located during the testing phase, [Adams84].

The principles behind Statistical Usage Testing are discussed in section 3, while the techniques within usage testing are further described in section 4, i.e. usage descriptions and reliability certification. In section 5 a minor example is presented to illustrate the usage testing technique described. Section 6 presents some practical experiences with usage testing techniques. Finally in section 7 some conclusions are presented.

## 2. Reliability requirement

The requirement specification contains normally both functional requirements and quality requirements; in particular reliability or availability requirements are put into the specification. The fulfilment of the functional requirements is evaluated through using the functions specified in the requirements, but the other requirements ought to be fulfilled as well. The methods for reliability certification have, however, not been available or the available techniques have not been applied. This must change, either it is no use formulating reliability requirements or methods to evaluate/certify the reliability must be applied.

Statistical Usage Testing is a method to actually certify the reliability requirement. This type of method must be applied, since it is not possible to keep applying traditional systematic testing techniques and then see the system fail in operation. This is a result of not certifying the reliability requirement. The society can not afford software system failures, neither in safety critical systems nor in other cost intensive systems.

The reliability requirement aims at the reliability as perceived by the users when the software system goes into operation. Therefore usage testing must be applied, since reliability is not only the number of faults but also the actual location of them compared with usage of the software system.

The method being presented will allow for certification of the reliability requirement, which means that we will be in control of the reliability before releasing the software product instead of being surprised as the system fails in operation.

## 3. Statistical Usage Testing

### 3.1. Cleanroom

Statistical Usage Testing (SUT) is the certification part of Cleanroom Software Engineering. Cleanroom is a methodology which consists of a set of software engineering and management principles as well as practices according to which software can be developed with very high quality and productivity [Mills87, Mills88, Cobb90]. The methodology has proven to be very successful when applied in software development companies in Europe as well as in the USA [Selby87, NASA90, OS-32]. Cleanroom is developed at IBM and Software Engineering Technology in the USA and further development and applications in Europe are performed by Q-Labs.

Cleanroom aims at development of almost zero-defect software with measurable reliability. The basic idea is to do things right from the beginning instead of first introducing and then correcting errors. Management and engineering techniques in Cleanroom are:

- The software is developed by small teams (3–5 people) with clearly defined responsibilities. There are three types of teams, specification, development and certification teams. The teams are jointly responsible for the produced result.
- Very much emphasis is put on rigorous specifications which are the basis for the development.
- The development is done in increments, each of which is executable. By partitioning the software into increments each increment may be handled by different

teams and developed in parallel. Furthermore the increments are small enough to be held under intellectual control.

- The software is developed in small steps from specification to design according to a step by step algorithm. Each step is a refinement of the prior. For each step more details are added and finally it ends up in executable code.
- Each of the development steps is rigorously verified towards the previous steps. The verification is mainly performed by reviews, supported by a theoretically based method called “functional verification”.
- Traditional testing is replaced by certification of the software reliability by Statistical Usage Testing.

Most of the techniques are well-known but the combination of these and the management attitudes have given encouraging results concerning software quality as well as productivity and lead time control. In this paper we concentrate on the certification part of Cleanroom, Statistical Usage Testing.

### **3.2. Usage based testing**

Traditional testing is often concerned with the technical details in the implementation, for example branch coverage, path coverage and boundary-value testing, [Myers79]. SUT on the contrary takes the view of the end user. The focus is not to test how the software is implemented, but how it fulfils its intended purpose from the users’ perspective. SUT is hence a black box testing technique. It treats the software as being a black box and is only concerned with the interfaces to the users.

SUT has two main objectives:

- To find the faults which have most influence on the reliability from the users’ perspective.
- To produce data which makes it possible to certify and predict the software reliability and thus know when to stop testing and to accept the product.

### **3.3. Cost effectiveness**

Studies show that usage based testing is an efficient way to find the faults which have most impact on the reliability [Adams84]. The referenced study shows a gain with a factor 20. From seven software development projects at IBM it is concluded that 1.6% percent of the faults cause 58% percent of the failures during operation, while 61% percent of the faults cause only 2.8% percent of the failures. Thus it is more efficient to remove the 1.6% of the faults.

Software reliability depends not only on the number of faults in the software, but also on how the software is used. A fault in a part of the software which is frequently used has larger impact on the reliability than a fault in a less frequently executed part.

As the study by Adams shows, the most efficient way to improve software reliability is to remove the faults causing most of the failures, and not those which occur very seldom. In

SUT test cases are selected to test according to the operational usage and are hence effective in order to find the faults which affect software reliability.

### **3.4. Software reliability certification**

The other objective of SUT is reliability certification, i.e. getting a reliability measure corresponding to the intended operational usage. To certify the software reliability there is a need for a reliability model which based on failure data from testing can estimate and predict the software reliability.

Most reliability growth models which can be used for reliability certification and prediction have a common prerequisite: usage based testing [Goel79, Jeliniski72, Musa87]. This prerequisite has been overlooked during the years, but has come into focus during the last years [Musa93, Runeson92].

### **3.5. Software acceptance**

The software reliability measure obtained in usage based testing can be used as a criterion for software acceptance as well as a stopping rule for the testing.

The contract between a supplier and a purchaser often includes a software reliability requirement to be fulfilled at delivery. Neither the supplier nor the purchaser however can prove that the requirement is fulfilled or not. SUT is a possibility for both parts to get objective measures which may be used for judgement about the requirement fulfilment.

From the supplier's side a question of interest is when to stop testing. Large parts of a software development project costs are spent on testing. There is a need for saving testing costs. However it can cost money for a supplier to deliver bad products as well in terms of damages or bad reputation. This emphasizes a need for controlling software reliability by using reliability measures as stopping criteria for software testing, which is provided by SUT.

## **4. SUT models and methods**

When applying SUT two kinds of models are needed, a model to describe the usage and a reliability model. In section 4.1 the usage description is presented while the reliability models are treated in section 4.2. A method describing how to use the models during Statistical Usage Testing is presented in section 4.3.

### **4.1. Usage description**

The usage description is a model which describes how the software is intended to be used during operation. Different types of models have been presented in the literature:

- Tree-structure models, which assign probabilities to sequences of events [Musa93].

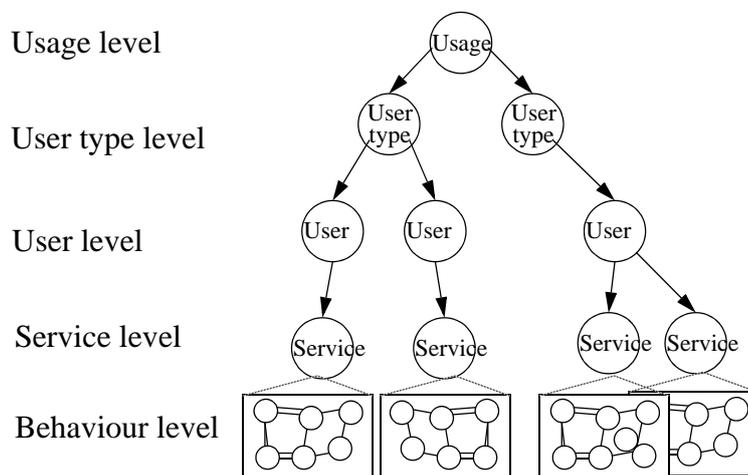
- Markov based models, which can describe more complex usage and model single events [Whittaker92, Runeson92].

The primary purpose of a usage description is to describe the usage to get a basis for how to select test cases for the usage based testing. It can however be used for analysis of the intended software usage as well, to plan the software development. Frequently used parts can be developed in earlier increments and thus be certified with higher confidence.

In this paper the State Hierarchy (SHY) usage description is briefly presented [Runeson92]. It consists of a usage model, which is the structural part, and a usage profile, which is the statistical part.

#### 4.1.1. Usage model

The SHY usage model is a hierarchical Markov chain which copes with description of the usage of large multi-user software systems. The basic concept of the SHY model is shown in figure 1. Examples below are taken from the telecommunications field.



**Figure 1.** SHY model

The usage is described as a hierarchy. The state on the top represents all the usage. The users can be divided into different user types or categories, for example for a small business exchange, secretaries, other employees and modem connections. Note that this example shows that a user must not be human.

For each of the user types, a number of individuals are described on the user level, for example one secretary, four other employees and one modem connection.

Each user individual can use a number of services, which are described on the service level, for example basic call and call forward.

The usage of the services is then described as plain Markov chains on the behaviour level.

The SHY model can be applied with different levels of detail depending on the actual application. The behaviour level can for example be excluded if less details are to be described in the usage model.

### 4.1.2. Usage profile

The usage profile adds the probabilities for selection of the branches to the usage model. Probabilities are assigned to the transitions in the behaviour level Markov chains as well.

The probabilities are assigned based on measurement on usage of earlier releases or on expert knowledge. The SHY model makes it possible to analyse parts of the usage and assign probabilities for only that part of the model at a time, for example a user type.

The assignment must not be in absolute figures. Classes of usage frequency can be used, for example very frequently, frequently and seldom used. These classes can be assigned relative probabilities which may be an easier task than to assign every single probability.

## 4.2. Reliability model

To analyse the failure data collected during the statistical testing a reliability model is needed. Several models have been published over the last 20 years, see [Goel85] for an overview. Models of different complexity and possibility to estimate the software reliability have been presented.

One very simple model which is suitable for software certification is the hypothesis testing control chart model [Musa87]. It is based on a traditional quality control technique: sequential sampling [Grant88].

The model is based on a control chart with three regions, reject, continue and accept, see figure 2. The control chart is constructed based on the required level of confidence in the estimation.

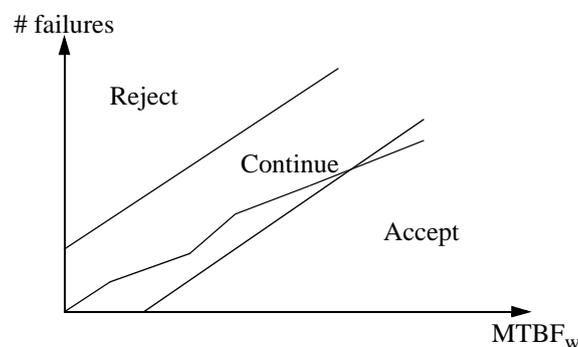


Figure 2. Hypothesis testing control chart.

The failure data is plotted in the chart, failure number towards weighted time between failure<sup>1</sup>. As long as the plots fall in the continue region, the testing has to continue. If the plot falls in the rejection region, the software reliability is so bad that it has to be rejected and re-engineered. If the plots fall in the acceptance region, the software can be accepted based on the required MTBF with given confidence and the testing can be stopped.

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1. Weighted time between failure means the measured time divided by the MTBF objective.

Thus the hypothesis certification model provides a means for certifying the software and giving a reliability measure for the software as well as a means for controlling the testing effort.

### 4.3. SUT method outline

The models presented above can be applied according the following method:

During specification:

1. Produce the usage model.
2. Assign the usage profile.

During test:

3. Select test cases from the usage description.
4. Run the test cases and collect failure data.
5. Certify the software.

During step 5 a decision is made based on the certification model outcome. If the failure data plots fall in the continue region, the method is repeated from 3 to 5 again. If the software is rejected, it is put back for redesign and finally if the failure data fall in the acceptance region, the certification is stopped and the software is accepted.

## 5. Example

This section contains an example which purpose is to make the models and methods presented in section 4 easier to understand and to apply. The method followed is the one presented in section 4.3. The subsections below are numbered according to the method outline. Most emphasis is put on section 5.1 while section 5.2 to section 5.5 are more briefly described since the techniques for usage description are less known than the other techniques.

The example on which the test method is applied is a private branch exchange (PBX) for a small office, see figure 3. Five human users are connected to the PBX, one secretary and four other employees. Furthermore there is one modem line. The connection with the outer world is through two lines. More details about the example specifications are given throughout the example.

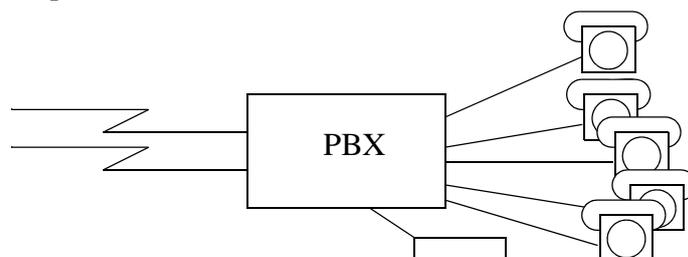


Figure 3. The example PBX system structure.

## 5.1. Produce the usage model

The SHY usage model, see figure 1, is produced in a number of steps, each of which is small and rather easy to perform. The steps are:

1. Identify the user types.
2. Determine the number of individuals for each type.
3. Identify the services available for the users of a specific type.
4. Describe the behaviour Markov chain for each service.
5. Instantiate the services for the users.

In the actual example the first three steps are fully shown, while the last is only partially performed in this paper.

The usage model is produced starting with identification of the different types of users. In this example there are four: Secretary, employee, modem and in/out line.

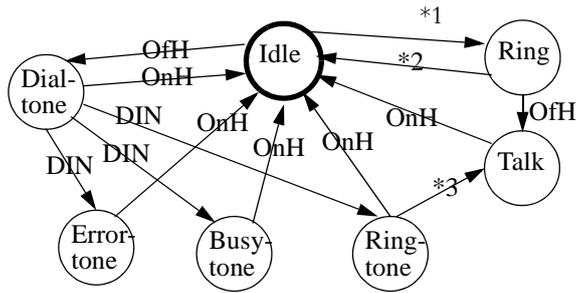
The different individuals of the user types are identified. There is one secretary, four employees, one modem and two in/out lines in the actual example.

The users have access to a set of services. The employees have internal and external basic call and internal call forward. The secretary has furthermore internal call transfer. The modem line has only external basic call. The in/out lines can only handle calls. In table 1 the first three steps in preparing the usage model for the PBX are summarised.

**Table 1: PBX usage**

User type	Instances	Services
Secretary	1	Internal basic call (IBC) External basic call (EBC) Internal call transfer (ICT)
Employee	4	Internal basic call (IBC) External basic call (EBC) Internal call forward (ICF)
Modem	1	External basic call (EBC)
In/Out-line	2	Call (C)

The behaviour level Markov chains for the services are then described, see figure 4 and figure 5. For the internal basic call the stimuli are selected to be: Off Hook (OfH) (lift the receiver), Dial Internal Number (DIN), On Hook (OnH). There is also an asterisk (\*) stimulus which means that the transition is forced by another behaviour level Markov chain. The state with thicker line is the start state. Note that the IBC service referenced in the link table is another instantiation of the service (another user).

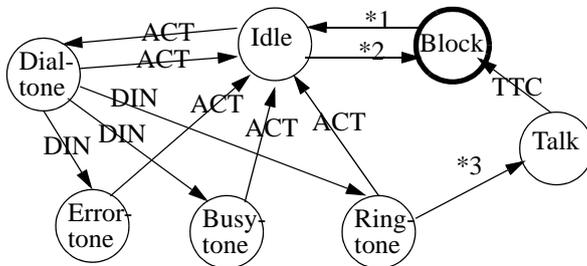


**Table 2: Link table**

Link	Forced by
1	IBC: Dialtone-DIN
2	IBC: Ringtone-OnH
3	IBC, ICT: Ring-OfH

**Figure 4.** Behaviour Markov chain for internal basic call (IBC).

The behaviour level Markov chain for the internal call transfer service is described in figure 5. The stimuli are: Activate Call Transfer (ACT), Dial Internal Number (DIN) and Transfer The Call (TTC). The linked transitions are forced by an instance of the Internal Basic Call (IBC) service.

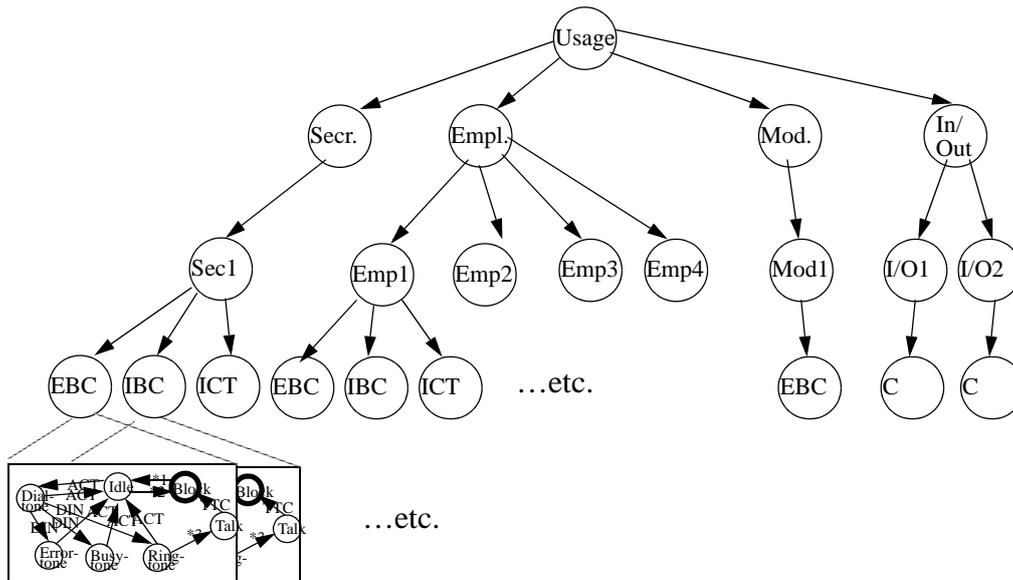


**Table 3: Link table**

Link	Forced by
1	IBC: Idle-OfH
2	IBC: OnH
3	IBC: Ring-OfH

**Figure 5.** Behaviour Markov chain for internal call transfer (ICT).

In this manner all the services are described; in this example however only these two are described. Finally the state hierarchy model is compounded by its parts. The usage model for the example as a whole is presented in figure 6.



**Figure 6.** Usage model for the PBX example.

## 5.2. Assign the usage profile

When the usage model is produced the probabilities for the arcs have to be assigned, i.e. the usage profile is assigned.

The assignment starts on the user level which corresponds to what is well-known, at least in terms of relations between the usage. In the example it is assumed that one out of five of the events origin from each of the in/out-lines. Among the other users it is assumed that an event from the secretary is three times as probable as events from three of the employees and equally probable as events from the fourth employee. Modem line events are equally probable as events from one of the three least probable employees.

Based on this information, an equation can be set up which gives the absolute probabilities for the users ( $P_a$ ):

$$P_a(\text{In/out1}) = P_a(\text{In/out2}) = 0.2;$$

$$P_a(\text{Secr}) = 0.18;$$

$$P_a(\text{Emp1}) = P_a(\text{Emp2}) = P_a(\text{Emp3}) = 0.06; P_a(\text{Emp4}) = 0.18;$$

$$P_a(\text{Modem}) = 0.06.$$

To apply these figures on the SHY usage model, they have to be divided on the user types and the user individuals. The user level probabilities ( $P_{ul}$ ) are given by the relations between the individuals. Since the sum of the probabilities equals one, the calculations for the employees are:

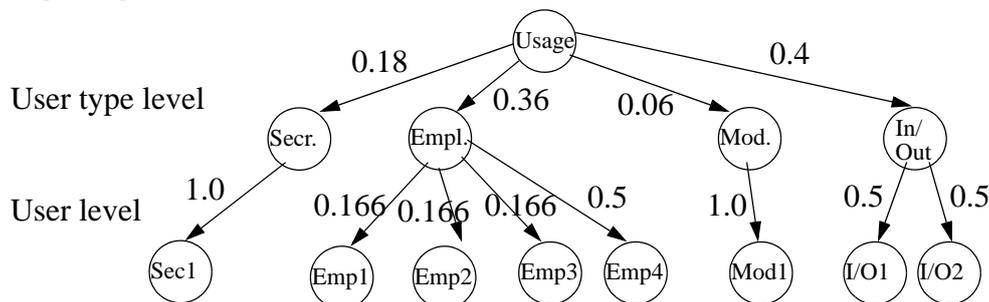
$$P_{ul}(\text{Emp1}) = P_{ul}(\text{Emp2}) = P_{ul}(\text{Emp3}) = 0.06/(0.06+0.06+0.06+0.18) = 0.166;$$

$$P_{ul}(\text{Emp4}) = 0.18/(0.06+0.06+0.06+0.18) = 0.5;$$

The sum of the absolute probabilities of a user type gives the user type level probabilities ( $P_{utl}$ ):

$$P_{utl}(\text{Emp}) = 0.06+0.06+0.06+0.18 = 0.36;$$

When all of the calculations are performed the usage profile applied on the SHY model is according to figure 7:



**Figure 7.** Usage profile for the upper levels of the example.

The transitions in the behaviour Markov chains are assigned probabilities as well, except for the transitions forced by other services. This gives a complete usage description from which test cases can be generated.

### 5.3. Select test cases

The test cases are selected from the usage description by traversing it beginning from the usage state and down to a single event. The actual path through the model is controlled by a random number sequence. For each event in a test case the description is traversed once. An example test case can start according to table 4:

**Table 4: Beginning of example test case**

Event no.	Event
1	Emp3: Off Hook
2	Emp3: Dial Internal Number
3	In/Out2: Call Subscriber

### 5.4. Run test cases

The test cases are run as during any other type of testing. During testing, failure data is collected. This data forms the basis for the certification, and is thus very important.

### 5.5. Certify the software

The failure data is input to the hypothesis testing model, see figure 2, which is used to certify a particular reliability level. The reliability is measured in terms of MTBF, and the certification is done with a given statistical confidence. The outcome from the certification is *reject*, *continue* or *accept*. In the case of *reject*, the software is sent back for redesign, in the case of *continue*, new test cases are selected and run, see section 5.3 and 5.4 above. If the outcome is *accept* the reliability level is certified and the testing can be stopped.

## 6. Practical experience

Statistical Usage Testing can be applied at different phases in the software life cycle. The testing can be applied during system testing or acceptance testing, but it may also be applied on software components, [Wohlin93], which then can be put into a repository for future reuse. The reuse of components is one important aspect in the future to cope with the cost of software development. Reuse requires that reliability measures of the reusable components are stored with the component. Reliability measures must be stored together with the usage profile which has been used in the certification process. Based on the reliability of components it must be possible to calculate the system reliability. This issue is further discussed in [Poore93].

It can from this reasoning be concluded that usage testing is a useful technique, which can be applied at different phases in the life cycle with the common denominator that reliability certification is needed to stay in control of the reliability.

Application of Statistical Usage Testing or similar techniques have started at different companies. AT & T has reported that they have lowered the cost for system testing by

56% and the total cost in the project by 11.5% by applying Operational Profile Testing, [Musa92, Musa93, Abramson92, Juhlin92]. The objective with Operational Profile Testing is the same as for Statistical Usage Testing even if some of the techniques to describe the usage are different.

Statistical Usage Testing was originally proposed by IBM and SET (Software Engineering Technology) in the USA. Both IBM, [Linger92], and SET, [Whittaker92], are applying the testing technique. The usage testing technique is starting to spread in Europe as well. Q-Labs has adopted and adapted the ideas from Cleanroom to some of its customer.

Q-Labs is currently applying Statistical Usage Testing principles at a number of customers. Some examples are:

- Statistical Usage Testing principles are currently being put into a requirement specification at one large customer. The objective is to apply the principles in usage testing during acceptance to be able to either accept or reject the software product being procured.
- Another customer, a large supplier of software, will use usage testing as a way for communication and understanding with its customer. In particular, to understand and thereby correct the type of failures the customers tend to experience during operation. Therefore the supplier will be able to increase the perceived reliability today and hence be able to deliver more reliable software in the future. The application of usage testing will allow the developer to find the faults which give rise to complaints from the purchaser of the software.
- Finally, a third customer to Q-Labs will try to, based on a grouping of functions in the system according to expected usage, certify a specific reliability level during system test before releasing the software.

The examples above show that usage testing is beginning to get used and the benefits of applying usage testing will continually grow. Therefore it is believed that usage testing will be one important asset in the work to get in control of the software reliability.

## 7. Conclusions

It is a fact that reliability or availability requirements are formulated as a part of the requirement specification, but it is also clear that neither the developer nor the procurer of the software is capable of evaluating these requirements. This is not satisfactory; the society depends so heavily on the systems that it is of outermost importance to be able to certify the software systems. A failure in operation may cause injuries either in terms of humans or at least in terms of financial losses.

A model to describe the usage has been presented and a reliability model based on hypothesis testing control chart has been described briefly. These techniques together have made it possible to formulate a method, which can be applied during the testing phase to actually evaluate the reliability requirements. The application of the proposed method has been illustrated in an example.

Some practical experiences reported in the literature as well as experience obtained while applying the proposed techniques have been presented. The overall conclusion is that, the

only way towards control of the reliability before releasing a software product is through application of usage testing techniques. It is the only technique that has shown to be able to certify the reliability requirement in the same time as it is cost effective. The application of the testing technique facilitates the formulation of a stopping criterion for the software testing, i.e. the testing can stop as the required reliability level has been reached.

The time has come to change the way of testing software. The objective must not be to find faults, but to show that the reliability requirements have been met. The test technique aims at finding the faults influencing the reliability the most, instead of just removing arbitrary faults. The technique is mature enough to be used and those managing the transition first will probably be the ones delivering the products with the right reliability, which not necessarily is the highest.

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