

Not all Dockerfile Smells are the Same

An Empirical Evaluation of Hadolint Writing Practices by Experts

Giovanni Rosa

Simone Scalabrino

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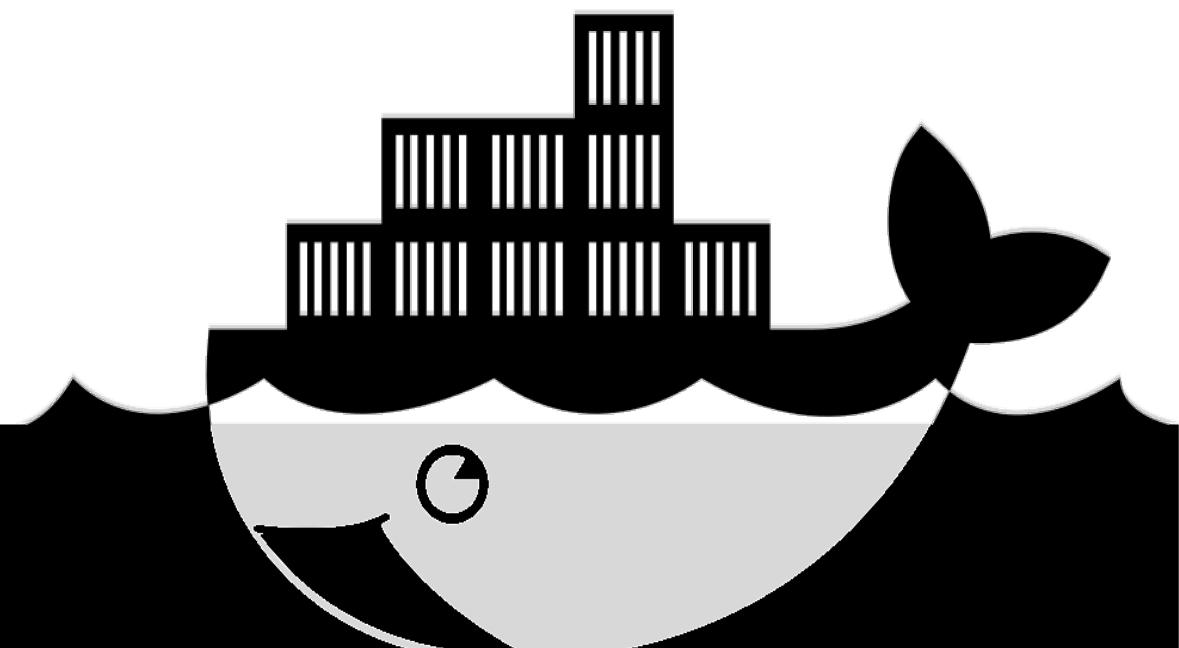
Rocco Oliveto

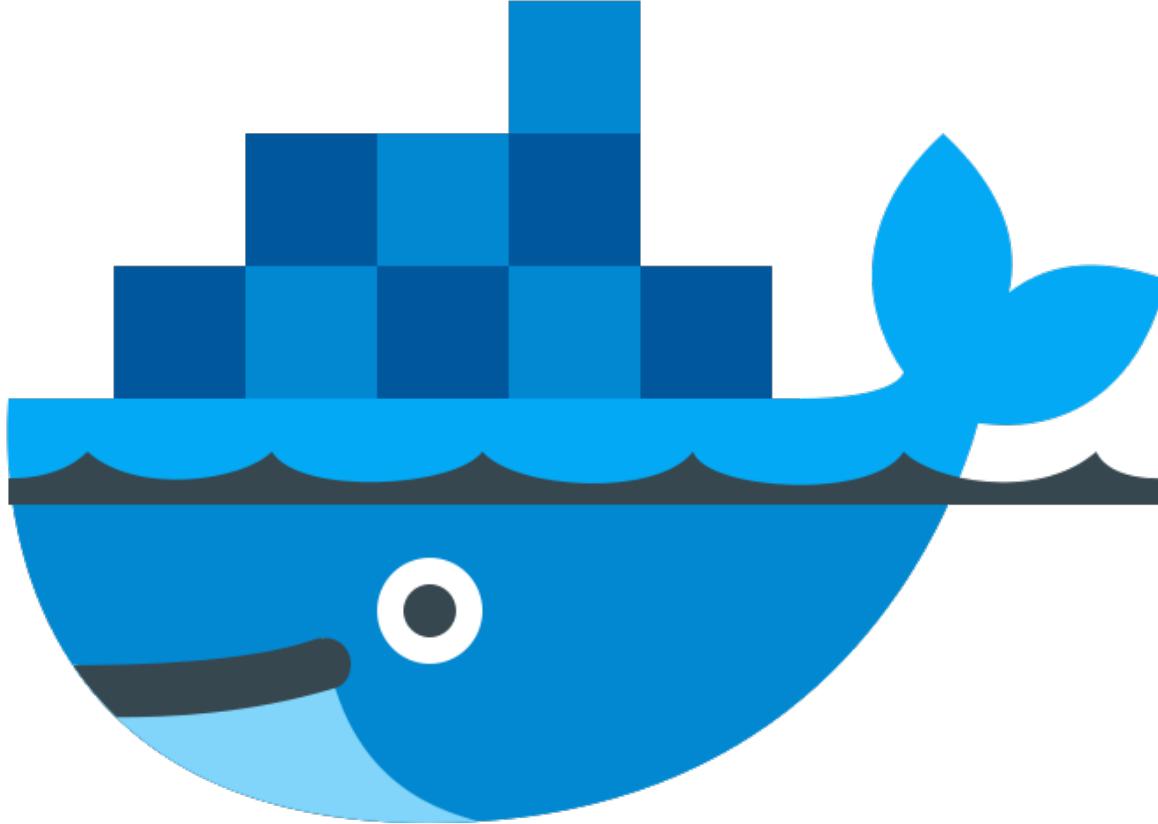


Università degli
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Universidad Rey
Juan Carlos





Docker is the Reference Tool
for Software Containerization

```
1 FROM node:12-alpine
2
3 RUN apk add --no-cache python2 g++ make
4
5 WORKDIR /app
6 COPY . .
```

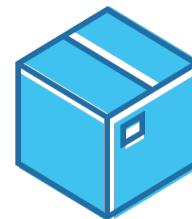
Dockerfile

Docker in a nutshell

```
1 FROM node:12-alpine  
2  
3 RUN apk add --no-cache python2 g++ make  
4  
5 WORKDIR /app  
6 COPY . .
```

Dockerfile

→
build



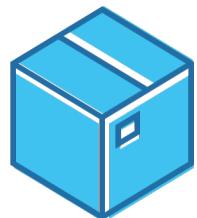
Image

Docker in a nutshell

```
1 FROM node:12-alpine  
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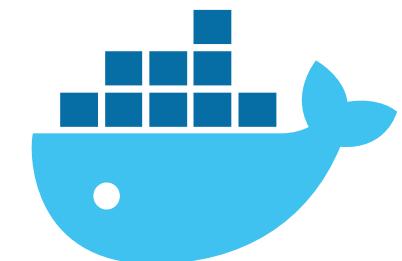
Dockerfile

build



Image

run



Container

Docker in a nutshell



Writing
Dockerfiles
is challenging

Revisiting Dockerfiles in Open Source Software Over Time

Eng et al., 2021

Abstract Docker is becoming ubiquitous with its application for developing and deploying applications. Previous studies have analyzed Dockerfiles that are used to create container images in order to better understand how to improve Docker coding. These studies have been limited to a single point in time. In this paper, we revisit the findings of previous studies using the largest set of Dockerfiles from GitHub with over 8.7 million unique Dockerfiles. We find that the Dockerfile adoption rate in the WebAssembly ecosystem has increased by 100% over the past decade spanning from 2013–2020. We conduct a historical view of the Dockerfiles in GitHub by examining the evolution of Dockerfiles to see the history of the evolution of Dockerfiles. We also reexamine previous findings of a dosimeter tool to using its improved version to analyze Dockerfiles. Our results show that Dockerfiles' smell counts are slightly decreasing showing that Dockerfile authors are likely getting better at Dockerfile writing. In the WebAssembly ecosystem, our findings are consistent with previous analysis from prior works but have been current to many of their findings and their suggestions to build better tools for Dockerfile analysis.

Index Terms—Docker, Dockerfiles, GitHub, Docker Hub, Docker adoption, Dockerfile analysis, Dockerfile evolution, Dockerfile smells, Dockerfile quality, Dockerfile metrics.

Dockerfiles [6] (2006, 2020) and RUN being the most popular Dockerfile instruction [5].

II. PREVIOUS WORK

In previous work, researchers have used Dockerfiles to better understand Docker and its repositories and to gather statistics on Dockerfiles.

A Study of Security Vulnerabilities on Docker Hub

Shu et al., 2017

ABSTRACT

Docker, a tool for creating and running programs in containers consistently across platforms, was initially released to the public on March 30, 2013 [1], [2]. Ever since its initial release, Docker has been rapidly growing following with 3.5 million docker repositories and 7 million Dockerfiles as reported in July 2020 [3].

The use of container software such as Docker has made application deployment easier, faster, and more reliable. Furthermore, it has also made Dockerfile writing simpler by reducing the amount of time needed to configure an appropriate environment by handling the needed configuration instructions in a Dockerfile which can then be used to create images for execution.

2020 IEEE/ACM 17th International Conference on Mining Software Repositories (MSR)

An Empirical Study of Build Failures in the Docker Context

Wu et al., 2021

ABSTRACT

Docker containers have become the de-facto industry standard. Docker builds often break, and a large amount of efforts are put into troubleshooting broken builds. Thus, studies have evaluated the frequency and impact of build failures. However, there is a lack of research that can provide insights into what causes build failures. This paper presents an empirical study of build failures in the Docker context. We collected 1,000 Docker build logs from 1,029 open-source projects located on GitHub. Using the Docker build logs, we measure the frequency-of-build failures and report the top five reasons. Furthermore, we compare the evolution of Docker build failures. Our results help to understand Docker build failures and contribute to Docker build failures and mitigate the need for collecting more empirical evidence.

KEYWORDS

Docker, Build Failure, Open-source

ICSE Refinement: None
Keywords: Docker, Build Failure, Open-source
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1. INTRODUCTION

Docker is one of the most popular communication tools in current DevOps practices. It enables the management of software packages or entire environments and can run on any operating system. Docker is a containerization technology that allows for the creation of isolated environments with their own operating systems. To make Docker easier to use, many studies have been recently conducted to understand its ecosystem [1].

<https://www.docker.com/> (last visited: 05/07/2021)

* Both authors contributed equally to this work.

Estimation is made either by hand or as part of this task. The process of estimating the number of Dockerfiles in GitHub is as follows: first, we search for Dockerfiles in GitHub and then we filter them by the date of creation. Finally, we count the total number of Dockerfiles found. This process is repeated until no new Dockerfiles are found.

** The "Initial Docker Adoption" report [2] found that 74% of companies use Docker as their primary container technology.

*** Docker is a trademark of Docker, Inc. in the U.S. and/or other countries. Docker, Inc. does not claim any rights to the names of the Dockerfiles in GitHub.

**** The "Dockerfile Smells" report [3] found that 44% of Dockerfiles in GitHub have a median of 4.1 smell counts in our study context. For each Docker project, more than 10 Dockerfiles were analyzed.

***** The "Build Failure Report" [4] found that 70% of Dockerfiles in GitHub have a median of 1.8 failure counts in our study context. The failure count and the time of Docker build failures are gradually increasing over time.

***** The "Internal Quality Report" [5] found that 70% of Dockerfiles in GitHub have a median of 1.8 failure counts in our study context. The failure count and the time of Docker build failures are gradually increasing over time.

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76



Build Failures



Security Issues



Internal Quality Issues

Revisiting Dockerfiles in Open Source Software Over Time

Eng et al., 2021

Abstract— Docker is becoming a ubiquitous tool for containerization for developing and deploying applications. Previous studies have analyzed Dockerfiles that are used to create container images in order to better understand how to improve Docker coding. These studies have been limited to a specific time period. In this paper, we study the evolution of Dockerfiles over time. We conduct the largest set of Dockerfile analysis to date with 3.7 million unique Dockerfiles from GitHub and Docker Hub, covering a period spanning from 2013–2020. We conduct a historical view of the Dockerfiles by analyzing the evolution of Dockerfiles. We also use the history of Dockerfiles to analyze the evolution of Dockerfiles. We also reexamine previous findings of a dosimeter tool in using its improved version to analyze Dockerfiles. Our results show that Dockerfile smell counts are slightly decreasing, meaning that Dockerfile authors are likely getting better at Dockerfile coding. We also find that Dockerfile smells have decreased over time. Our previous analysis of Dockerfiles in the WebAssembly ecosystem in July 2020 found 3.5 million unique Dockerfiles. In this work, we find 3.7 million unique Dockerfiles, which is an increase of 5.7%. We conclude that Dockerfiles are becoming more complex and more difficult to maintain.

Index Terms— Docker, Dockerfiles, Containerization, Software Evolution, Code Smells.

Dockerfiles [6] (2016, 2020) and RUN being the most popular Dockerfile instruction [5].

II. PREVIOUS WORK

In previous work, researchers have studied Dockerfiles to better understand Docker as a repository and its evolution over time.

A Study of Security Vulnerabilities on Docker Hub

Shu et al., 2017

ABSTRACT

Docker, a tool for creating and running programs in containers consistently across platforms, was initially released to the public on March 30, 2013 [1], [2]. Ever since its initial release, Docker has been rapidly growing, especially following its 3.5 million desktop installations and 7 million Dockerfiles in July 2020 [3].

The use of container software such as Docker has made application deployment, delivery, and management easier. Furthermore, it has also made Dockerfile writing simpler by reducing the amount of time needed to configure an appropriate environment by handling the needed configuration instructions in a Dockerfile which can then be used to create images for containers.

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An Empirical Study of Build Failures in the Docker Context

Wu et al., 2021

ABSTRACT

Docker containers have become the de-facto industry standard. Docker builds often break, and a large amount of efforts are put into troubleshooting broken builds. Thus, studies have evaluated the frequency and causes of build failures. However, there is a lack about the frequency and the effect of failures that occurs in Docker builds of open-source projects. This paper presents a first study of build failures in the Docker context. We crawled 1,100 Docker builds from 1,639 open-source projects located on GitHub. Using the Docker build logs, we measure the frequency-of-build failures and report their causes. Furthermore, we compare the evolution of Docker build failures over time. Our results help Docker users understand Docker build failures and motivate the need for collecting more empirical evidence.

KEY WORDS

Docker; Build Failure; Open-source

ICSE Refinement: Frontend; New Wang; and Huihuan Wang. 2020. An empirical study of Build Failures in the Docker Context. In 42nd International Conference on Software Engineering (ICSE ’20), October 4–10, 2020, Virtual Event, China, 1–12. Association for Computing Machinery, New York, NY, USA, 3 pages. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3389972.3390006>

1. INTRODUCTION

Docker containers have become the de-facto industry standard. Docker builds often break, and a large amount of efforts are put into troubleshooting broken builds. Thus, studies have evaluated the frequency and causes of build failures. However, there is a lack about the frequency and the effect of failures that occurs in Docker builds of open-source projects.

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2. RELATED WORK

Frontend; New Wang; and Huihuan Wang. 2020. An empirical study of Build Failures in the Docker Context. In 42nd International Conference on Software Engineering (ICSE ’20), October 4–10, 2020, Virtual Event, China, 1–12. Association for Computing Machinery, New York, NY, USA, 3 pages. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3389972.3390006>

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3. STUDY SETUP

Figure 1 gives an overview of our study based on the RQs we have defined. It shows the process of collecting Dockerfiles, analyzing Dockerfiles, and performing our study on them.

3.1. Dockerfiles Collection. We collected Dockerfiles from GitHub and Docker Hub. We collected Dockerfiles from GitHub using the GitHub API. Dockerfiles in Docker’s official repositories containing



Build Failures



Security Issues



Internal Quality Issues

Dockerfile Smells



HaDoLint

(Haskell Dockerfile Linter)

A Linter for Dockerfiles

An Empirical Analysis of the Docker Container Ecosystem on GitHub

Jürgen Cito¹, Philipp Schermann^{*}, John Erik Wittern¹, Philipp Leitner¹, Sali Memeti¹, Michael C. Gall^{*}
Cito et al., 2017
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Abstract—Docker allows packaging an application with its dependencies into a standardized, self-contained unit (a so-called container), which can be used for software development and to run the application on any system. Dockerfiles are declarative definitions of an environment that aim to enable reproducible builds of the container. They can often be found in source code repositories of open source projects and are used to define the execution environment. We conduct an exploratory empirical study with the goal of characterizing the Docker ecosystem, prevalent quality issues, and the evolution of Dockerfiles. We base our study on a data set of over 70000 Dockerfiles, and contrast this general population with samplings that contain the Top-100 and Top-1000 most popular Docker-using projects. We find that most quality issues (28.6%) arise from missing version pinning (i.e., specifying a concrete version for dependencies). Further, we were able to build a representative sample of Dockerfiles from a sample of 560 projects. Integrating quality checks, e.g., to issue version pinning warnings, into the container build process could result into more reproducible builds. The most popular projects change more often than the rest of the Docker population, with 5.81 revisions per year and 5 lines of code changed on average. Most changes deal with dependencies, that are currently stored in a rather unstructured manner. We propose to introduce an abstraction that, for instance, could deal with the intricacies of different package managers and could improve migration to more light-weight images.

Keywords—empirical software engineering; GitHub; Docker

I. INTRODUCTION

Containerization has recently gained interest as a light-weight virtualization technology to define software infrastructure. Containers allow to package an application with its dependencies and execution environment into a standardized, self-contained unit, which can be used for software development and to run the application on any system. Due to their rapid spread in the software development community, Docker containers have become the de-facto standard format [1]. The contents of a Docker container are declaratively defined in a *Dockerfile* that stores instructions to reach a certain infrastructure state [2], following the notion of Infrastructure-as-Code (IaC) [3]. Source code repositories containing Dockerfiles, thus, potentially enable the execution of program code in an isolated and fast environment with one command. Since its inception in 2013, repositories on GitHub have added 70197 Dockerfiles to their projects (until October 2016).

Given the fast rise in popularity, its ubiquitous nature in industry, and its surrounding claim of enabling reproducibil-

ity [4], we study the Docker ecosystem with respect to quality of Dockerfiles and their change and evolution behavior within software repositories. We developed a tool chain that transforms Dockerfiles and their evolution in Git repositories into a relational database model. We mined the entire population of Dockerfiles on GitHub as of October 2016, and summarize our findings on the ecosystem in general, quality aspects, and evolution behavior. The results of our study can inform standard bodies around containers and tool developers to develop better support to improve quality and drive ecosystem change.

We make the following contributions through our exploratory study:

Ecosystem Overview. We characterize the ecosystem of Docker containers on GitHub by analyzing the distribution of projects using Docker, broken down by primary programming language, project size, and the base infrastructure (*base image*) they inherit from. We learn, among other things, that most inherited base images are well-established, but heavy-weight operating systems, while light-weight alternatives are in the minority. However, this defeats the purpose of containers to lower the footprint of virtualization. We envision a recommendation system that analyzes Dockerfiles and transforms its dependency sources to work with light-weight base images.

Quality Assessment. We assess the quality of Dockerfiles on GitHub by classifying results of a Dockerfile Linter [5]. Most of the issues we encountered considered version pinning (i.e., specifying a concrete version for either base images or dependencies), accounting for 28.6% of quality issues. We also built the Dockerfiles for a representative sample of 560 repositories. 66% of Dockerfiles could be built successfully with an average build time of 145.9 seconds. Integrating quality checks into the “docker build” process to warn developers early about build-breaking issues, such as version pinning, can lead to more reproducible builds.

Evolution Behavior. We classify different kinds of changes between consecutive versions of Dockerfiles to characterize their evolution within a repository. On average, Dockerfiles only changed 3.11 times per year, with a mean 3.98 lines of code changed per revision. However, more popular projects revise up to 5.81 per year with 5 lines changed. Dependencies see a high rate of change over time, reinforcing our findings to improve dependency handling from the analysis of the

84%

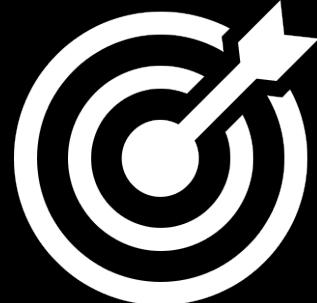
Dockerfiles affected by smells

Detecting Dockerfile Smells

Do developers care?

Do developers care?

Let's ask the experts!



Preliminary
Study

What smells can be
found in Dockerfiles
made by experts?



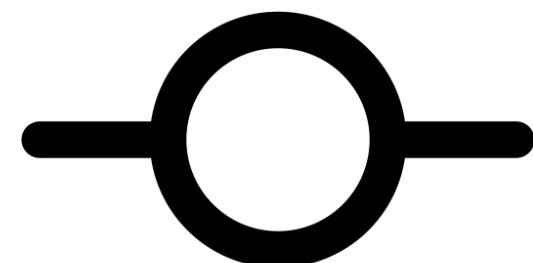
39 Official Docker Repos

Experimental Procedure

RQ1



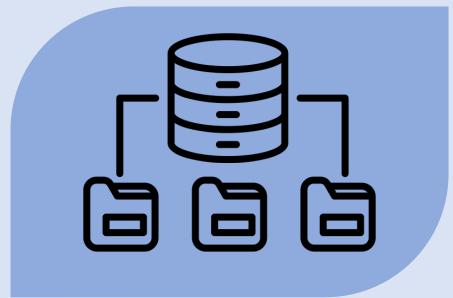
Docker Repos



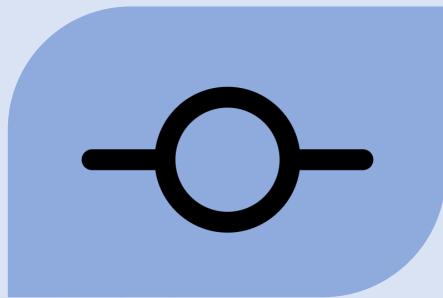
37k Git Commits

Experimental Procedure

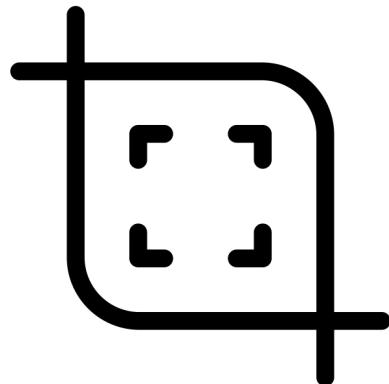
RQ1



Docker Repos



Repo History



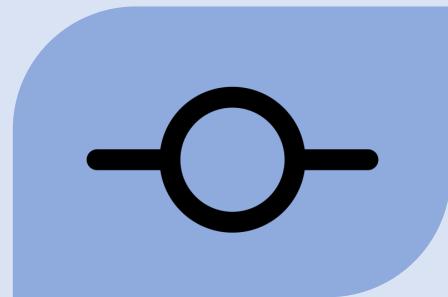
724 Dockerfile Snapshots

Experimental Procedure

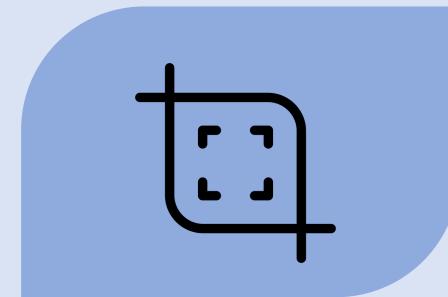
RQ1



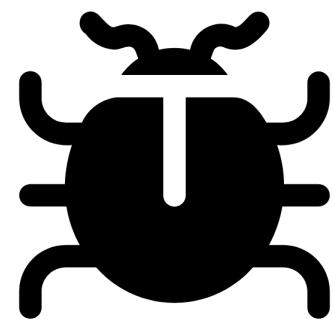
Docker Repos



Repo History



Dockerfiles



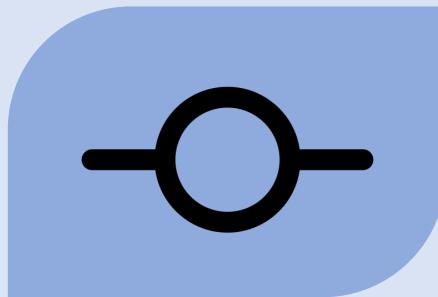
Unique Smell Occurrences

Experimental Procedure

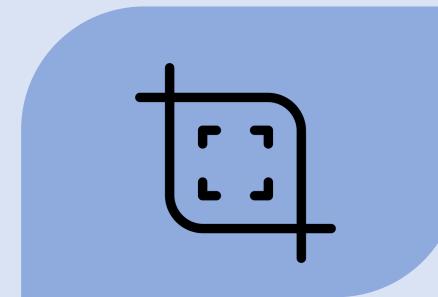
RQ1



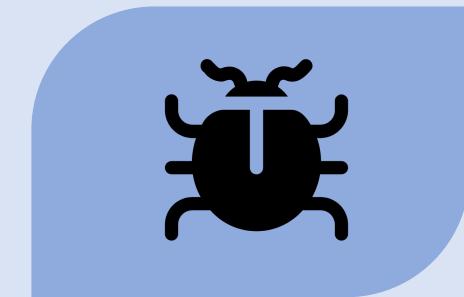
Docker Repos



Repo History



Dockerfiles

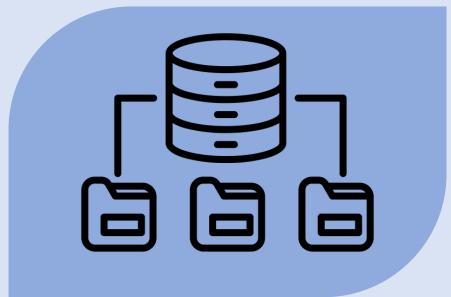


Smells

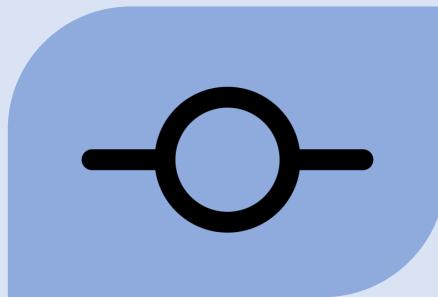
6k
Smells Affecting
Official Dockerfiles

Results

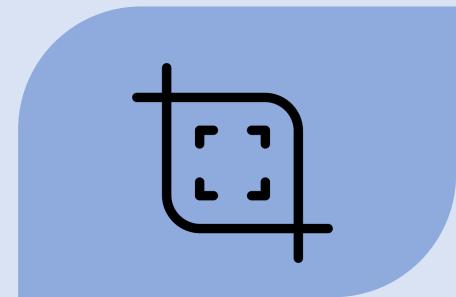
RQ1



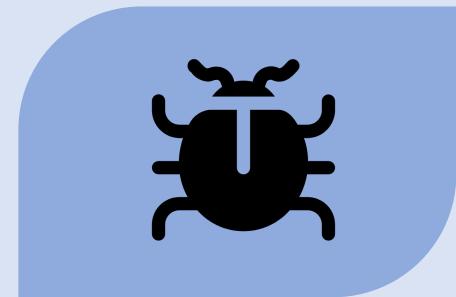
Docker Repos



Repo History



Dockerfiles



Smells

6k
Smells Affecting
Official Dockerfiles

Use of WORKDIR

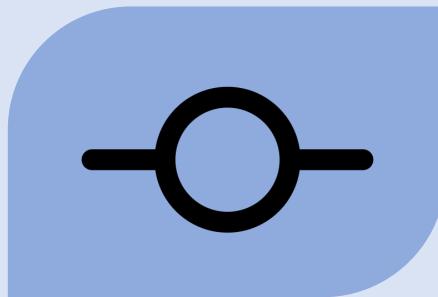
3

Results

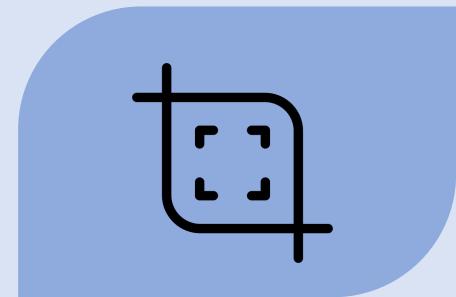
RQ1



Docker Repos



Repo History



Dockerfiles



Smells

6K
Smells Affecting
Official Dockerfiles

Use of WORKDIR

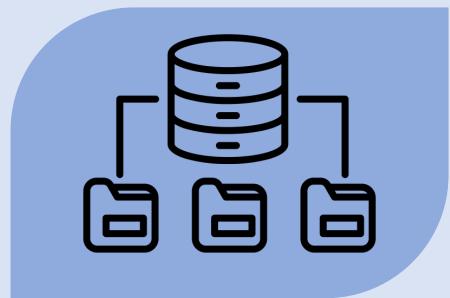
3

Version Pinning

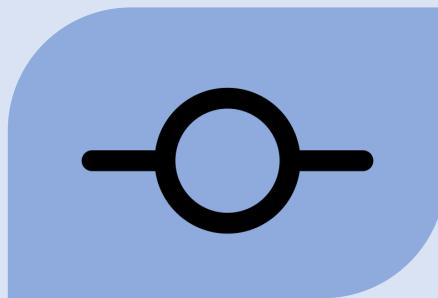
2

Results

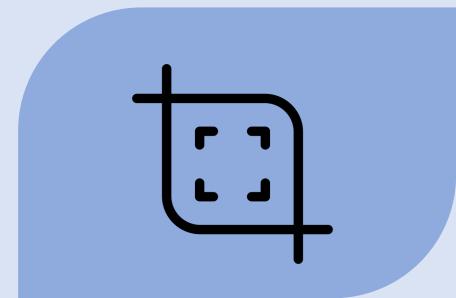
RQ1



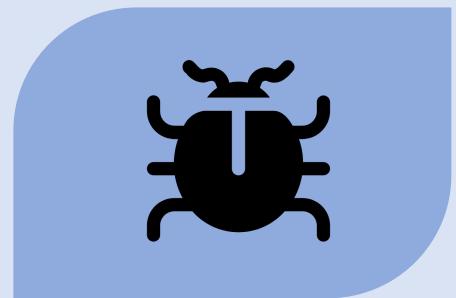
Docker Repos



Repo History



Dockerfiles



Smells

6K
Smells Affecting
Official Dockerfiles

Use of WORKDIR

3

Version Pinning

2

Shell Pipefail

1

Results



Asking the
Experts

Are the Dockerfile
Smells detected by
Hadolint actual
Bad Practices?

RQ2



39 Official Docker Repos

Experimental Procedure

RQ2



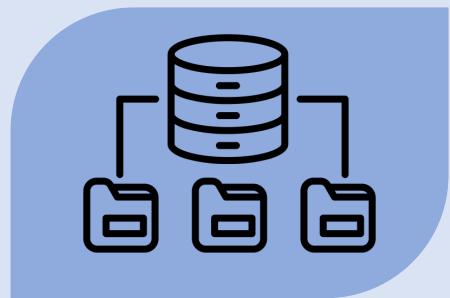
Docker Repos



1k Expert Developers

Experimental Procedure

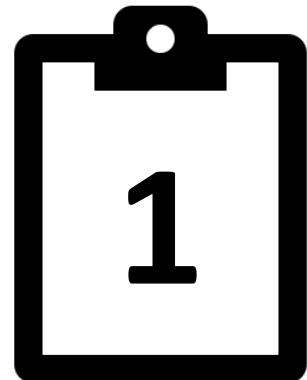
RQ2



Docker Repos



Contributors



Demographic Information

Experimental Procedure

RQ2



Docker Repos



Contributors



Pre-Survey



Smell Identification Tasks

Experimental Procedure

RQ2



Docker Repos



Contributors



Pre-Survey



Identification

1

```
1 FROM node:12-alpine
2
3 RUN apk add --no-cache python2 g++ make
4
5 WORKDIR /app
6 COPY . .
```

Clean Dockerfiles

Experimental Procedure

RQ2



Docker Repos



Contributors



Pre-Survey



Identification

1

```
1 FROM node:12-alpine
2
3 RUN apk add --no-cache python2 g++ make
4
5 WORKDIR /app
6 COPY ..
```

2

```
1 FROM node:12-alpine
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3 RUN apk add --no-cache python2 g++ make
4
5 WORKDIR /app
6 COPY ..
```

Clean Dockerfiles

Smell Injection

Experimental Procedure

RQ2



Docker Repos



Contributors



Pre-Survey



Identification

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5 WORKDIR /app
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2

```
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```

3

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```

Clean Dockerfiles

Smell Injection

Identification

Experimental Procedure

RQ2



Docker Repos



Contributors



Pre-Survey



Identification

37
Participants

Results

RQ2



Docker Repos



Contributors



Pre-Survey



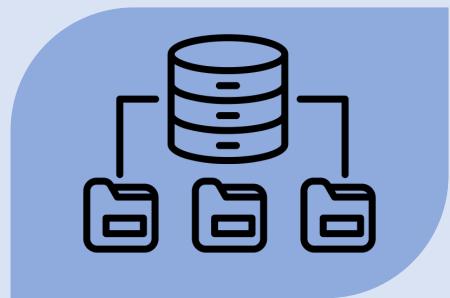
Identification

37
Participants

64%
Hadolint Smells
not Identified

Results

RQ2



Docker Repos



Contributors



Pre-Survey



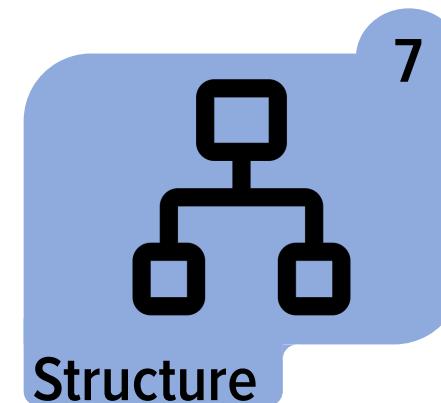
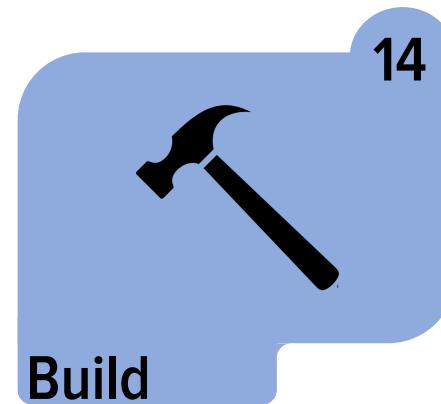
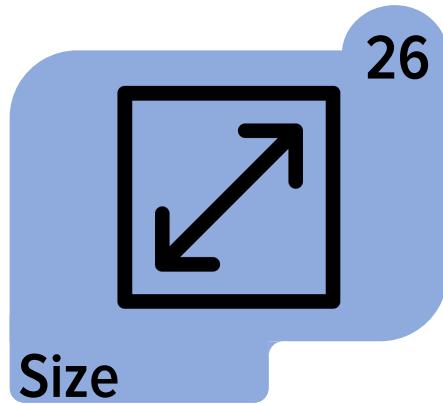
Identification

37
Participants

64%
Hadolint Smells
not Identified

26
Unexpected
Smells

Results



Taxonomy of New Recommendations



Binnacle



DRIVE



Dockercleaner

Mapping with Existing Catalogs



Binnacle



DRIVE



Dockercleaner

20
Not Mapped

Mapping with Existing Catalogs

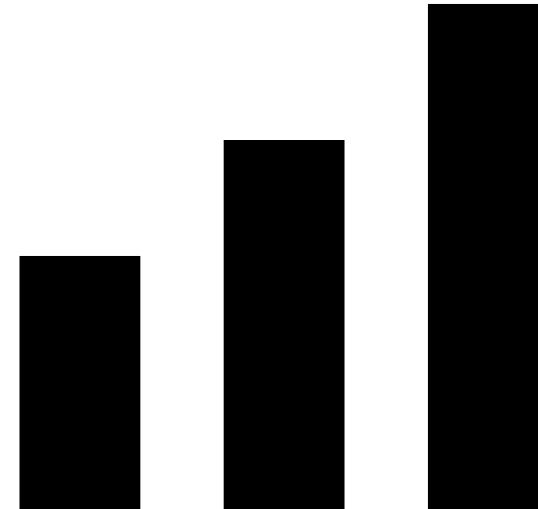
H Hadolint

 Binnacle

 DRIVE

 Dockercleaner

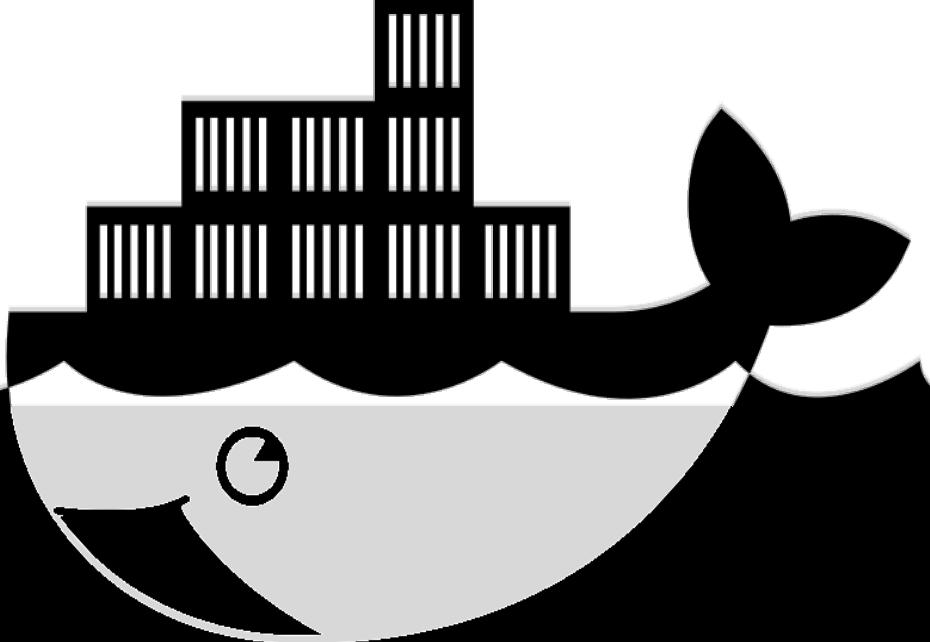
 New smells



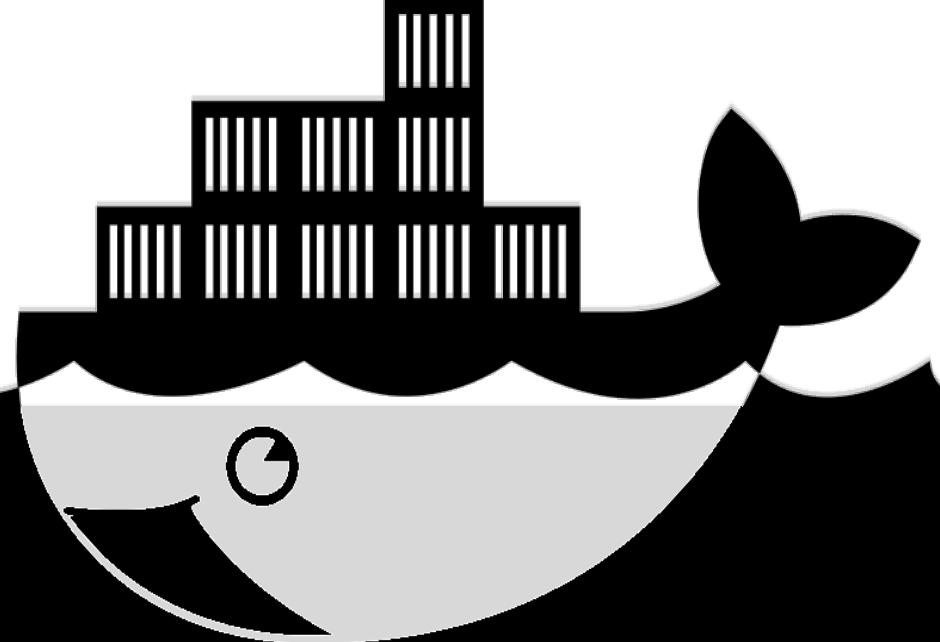
Ranking of
Dockerfile Smells

Mapping with Existing Catalogs

Wrapping up

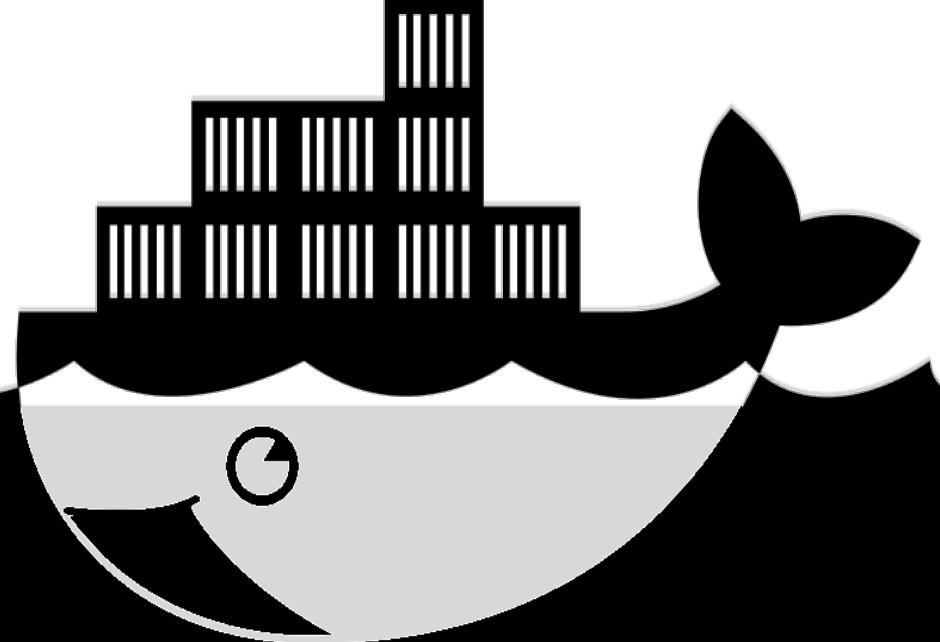


Wrapping up



- 1 Only a few Hadolint smells are important to experts

Wrapping up



- 1 Only a few Hadolint smells are important to experts
- 2 Experts focus on performance and security

Not all Dockerfile Smells are the Same

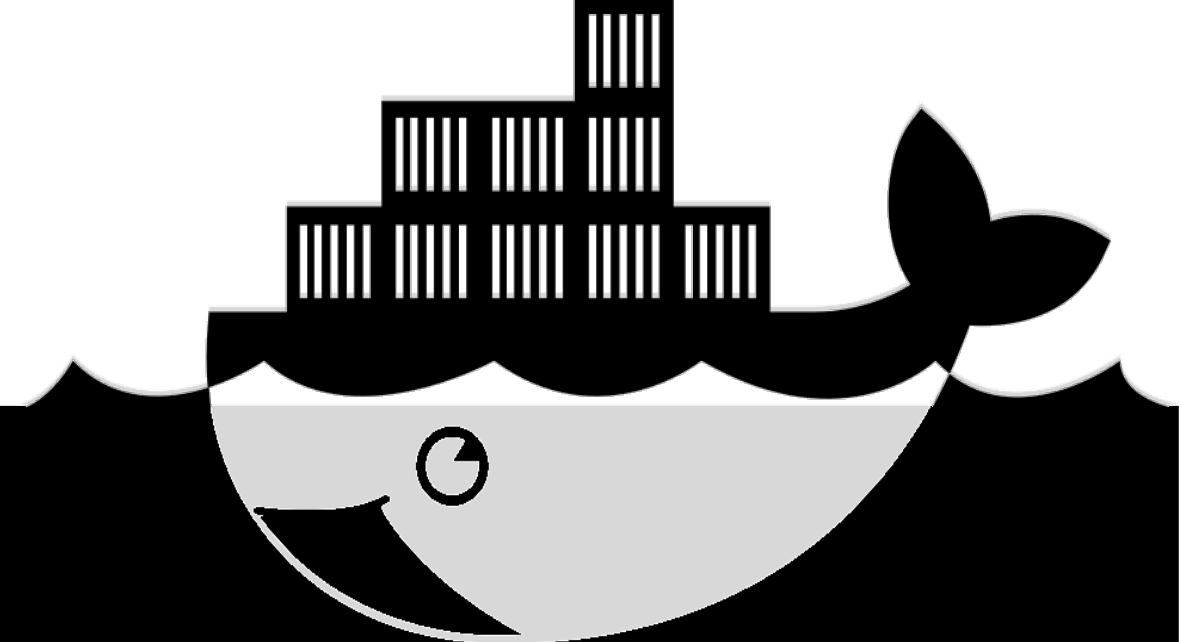
An Empirical Evaluation of Hadolint
Writing Practices by Experts

Giovanni Rosa

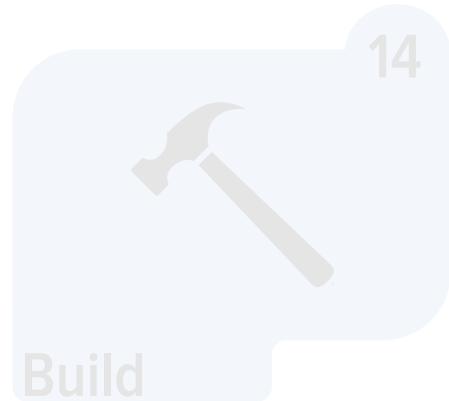
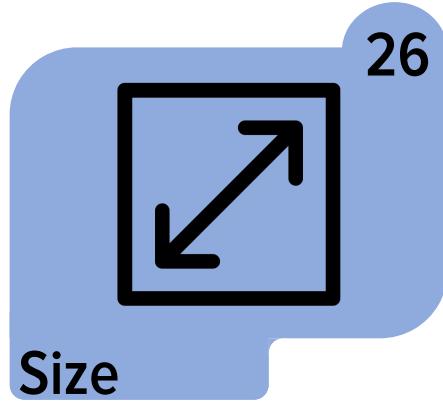
Simone Scalabrino

Gregorio Robles

Rocco Oliveto



- 1 Only a few Hadolint smells are important to experts
- 2 Experts focus on performance and security



“Copy only the necessary files from the build context”



Size



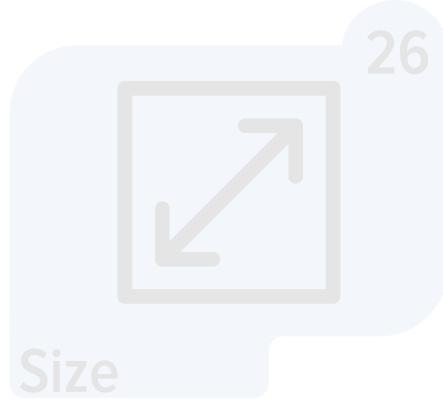
Execution



Build

*“Prefer a binary executable
for ENTRYPPOINT”*

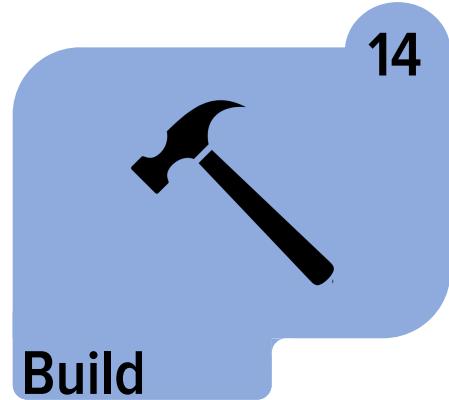
Taxonomy of New Recommendations



Size



Execution



Build

“Copy dependencies
before sources”

The background features three semi-transparent rounded rectangles. The first is light gray with a camera icon and the number '13'. The second is light blue with a lock icon and the number '7'. The third is light blue with a padlock icon and the number '1'. The text “Copy dependencies before sources” is centered over these icons.

Taxonomy of New Recommendations

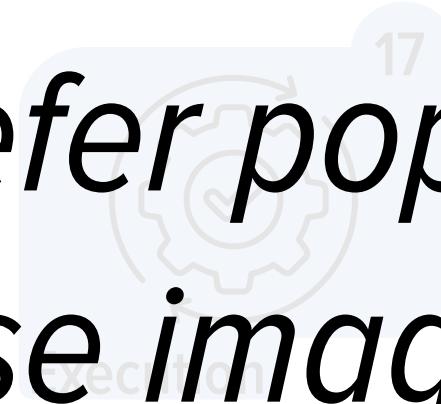


Size



Versions

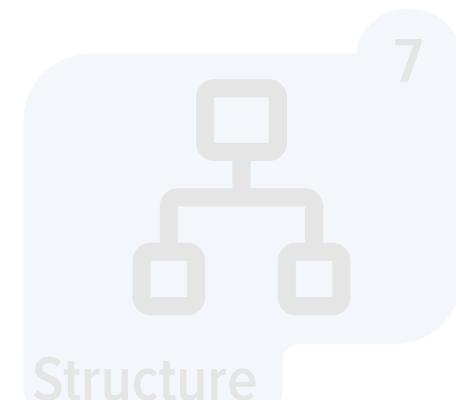
*“Prefer popular
base images”*



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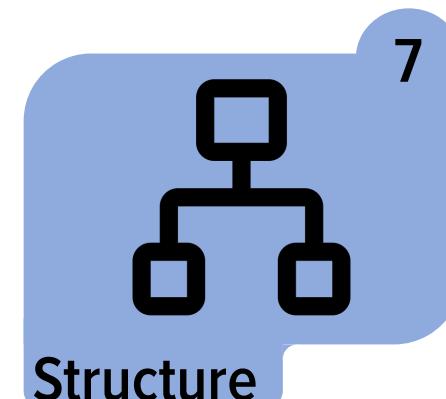
Build



7

Taxonomy of New Recommendations

“Avoid hard-coded values”



Taxonomy of New Recommendations