The Pain of Working with Legacy, and Strategies to Make It Easier

Opinionated views based on 20+ years in industry

Catherine Quinn 2023

“A legacy system is **outdated** computing software and/or hardware that is **still in use**. The system still meets the needs it was originally designed for, but doesn’t allow for growth. What a legacy system does now for the company is **all it will ever do**.”

How organisations are dealing with legacy today isn’t working

- Respect for the Application
- Right Mindset
- Sense of Ownership
- Team Structure

How organisations are dealing with legacy today isn’t working

Respect for the application

Undervalued

Reduced to a joke

Not given the same care and respect of go forward systems

Patching and clean up avoided

Right mindset of individuals

Throw out good practices

Considered a detractor from career goals

How organisations are dealing with legacy today isn't working

Ownership

People actively avoid working on it

Over index "tick and flick" processes

Team Structures

Allow for individuals to be single points of dependency

Two classes of citizens - Vanguards vs Old Guard

Optimises for those who already have knowledge and are uncomfortable learning new ways

The legacy world can also be used a place to cut your teeth and earn your stripes

What organisations are left with

- Lack of knowledge
- Additional time in incidents
- A fragile system
- Wasted time

This results in

- Volatile and unpredictable behaviour
- Additional unplanned work
- Unpatched system / security risk
- Vicious cycle

We’re thinking about legacy wrong

“A legacy system is **outdated computing software** and/or hardware that is still in use. The system still meets the needs it was originally designed for, but doesn’t allow for growth”

“Legacies sometimes arise from extraordinary actions that can change the course of history as well as expectations for what is possible”

- Miller et al., 2009;Wittenberg, 2013;Wohl, 2019

Heritage Listed Systems

"A Heritage listing provides formal recognition that a place or object has **historical significance** for the community and should be **protected under law**"

"It's a building of great **historical** or artistic **value** that has **official protection** to prevent it from being changed or destroyed"

"The Heritage Act requires you to maintain your State significant heritage property so that it does not fall into disrepair and its conservation is not threatened"

How to apply Heritage Listed thinking

Team Structures

Create a culture where the team is overly protective

Establish and agree on ownership and domain boundaries

Separate the layers for team boundaries and ownership

Use a third party vendor - BE CAREFUL

Ownership

Set clear ownership boundaries

Define the level of service you want to provide

How to apply Heritage Listed thinking

Respect for the Application

Get to know baselines

Apply good, modern practices

Dedicate time

Right mindset of individuals

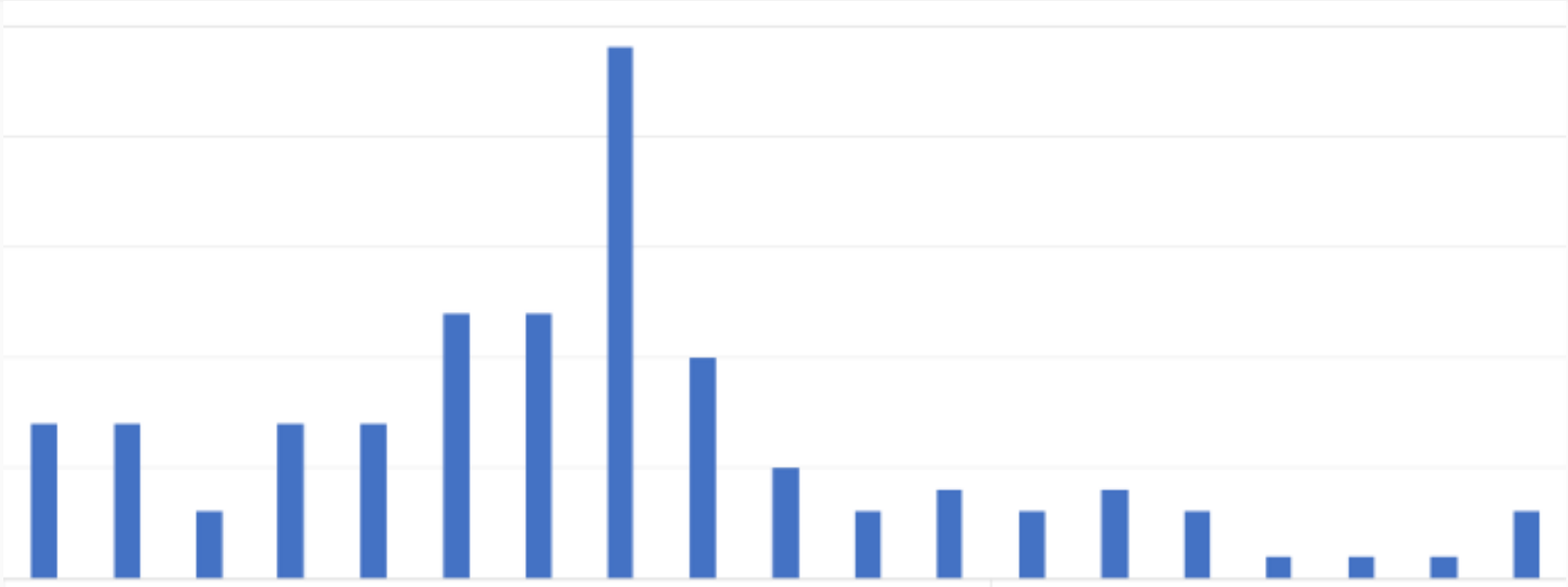
Always hire for mindset especially for senior roles where the already have the technical chops

Caretaking Heritage Listed applications can be very interesting

What organisations are left with

- Stronger Engineering Teams
- A system to last the duration
- Best chance at hitting transformation targets
- A Legacy to be proud of

Applying these strategies



Questions