Moss-Backs, Legacy Systems and Re-engineering

by John F. Covin

John F. Covin

Moss-Backs and Legacy Systems

"Moss-Back" is a colloquial term lovingly coined to describe those old timers who "just didn't get it" in a church I once attended. They refused to see things in a new light and consequently frustrated attempts to do things differently. They represented and honored the good aspects of the old way of doing things.

Legacy systems and their champions are like Moss-Backs for some organizations. In the opinion of those attempting to do things differently, these systems just can't cut it for the new way of doing business. They are hard to change and frustrate user attempts to do things differently. Yet these legacy systems also represent some, perhaps many, features that are still needed and valuable to an organization. It is not clear to many who have used them successfully for years why the changes are necessary.

Change and Re-engineering

Re-engineering is a strategy of expediting changes that will happen naturally over time. If it is to carry out its mission, re-engineering involves an enormous amount of time devoted to addressing and managing change: Change of systems and attitudes alike. Many times change management finds that the new way of doing things is the polar opposite from what was valued, cherished, and rewarded previously. It is essential that those being asked to change understand that the rules have changed. Usually we are asked to unlearn things instantly that took years to learn in the first place. The unlearning of several years of reinforced conditioning breeds resistance. Swimming instructors will confirm that infants learn to swim faster and better than older children who have been conditioned by years of "do not go near the water" safeguards. Indeed, in this case, long-time barriers to learning cause and reinforce resistance to change.

Essentially, managing change simply means reorienting our mind sets, paradigms and patterns into fresh new pictures, images, and habits. Most times the new picture is simpler than the old, and eventually most agree the changes are for the better, though not always. Can you remember what it was like before Federal Express, facsimile, microwave ovens, automatic teller machines, client/server architecture, open systems, objects and Windows?

A Model of Change

One model of change suggests that there are four stages we all go through every time we change anything:

1. Contentment	3. Chaos/ Confusion
2. Denial/ Resistance	4. Creative/ Innovation

Reflecting on the last several years in the MUG/MTA community brings reminders of times in each of the stages. As individuals we go through these stages at differing rates, and, as an organization, we go through the stages at a rate determined by the sum of the parts.

Re-engineering Ourselves

MTA's Annual Conference is being changed. Next March, less than 6 months from now, we will hold our Annual Conference in Boston in conjunction with Database and Client/ Server World. About 1000+ M professionals will convene for our 25th annual meeting and rub shoulders with about 20,000 IS/IT professionals who may never have heard of M/ MUMPS. We are re-engineering ourselves, so to speak, into the mainstream IS world.

Many of the 20,000 will have Moss-Back attitudes regarding the M Technologies. Many will be protective of their legacy systems and not open to change, not open to learning a new tech-

nology they've never heard about. For some, M technology may not suit their particular situation. For many others, it is likely to be the perfect solution for their business needs. However, for all in attendance, it is important that they know more about the technology, what business needs it is meeting, and the extent to which it is the technology of choice worldwide.

There is another important reason we are collaborating with the Database and Client/Server World trade show. In our attempt to meet your emerging needs, your Board of Directors believes that MTA can deliver an exposure to M-compatible technologies that will facilitate your organization's decision-making processes.

Make your plans now to be in Boston next March for Database and Client/Server World. Don't miss M taking the mainstream by storm. We want you to be a part of it. You will see M people you know from past Annual Meetings. You will see familiar exhibitors that you have grown to know and be comfortable with. You will see M raise some eyebrows. And, you are likely to hear: "Who are those guys?" "Where did they come from?" and "Where are they going?"

The MTA staff, Board of Directors, and 1996 Program Committee are working hard to ensure that each of you has moved through the first 3 stages of change and that you are now enjoying the Creative/Innovative fourth stage. Make plans to experience our brand new MTA Annual Conference next March in Boston. See you there.   M

John Covin is chair of the MTA Board of Directors and is senior vice president, customer services and strategic development at Corning SciCor, Inc., in Indianapolis.

MTA NOTEBOOK

MTA's 25th Annual Conference will be alongside Database & Client/Server World at the Hynes Convention Center in Boston, March 1996. We intend to celebrate our Silver Anniversary with all of you who are able to attend. Our conferencee theme is "M Serves the World", and we'll be showing off the best of M Technology to the M community and non-M users alike.

Here's what the Massachusetts Convention Center Authority has to say about Boston and the Hynes Convention Center:

"There's lots to get excited about in Boston. For starters, there's the Hynes Convention Center, located in the heart of Boston's elegant Back Bay. It's just one block away from the galleries, shops and cafes of fashionable Newbury Street. Then there are the dozens of other famous Boston attractions also within easy walking distance: you can stroll along The Freedom Trail, shop or dine at historic Faneuil Hall Marketplace, pay a visit to the Old North Church, and admire the skyline from the top of the John Hancock Tower."

Here's a great opportunity to market your company or product-SPONSOR an item or event at the MTA DB&C/S World show. . . . Get involved and have your company shine above the rest. Call MTA for more details.

Exhibit in the M Technology Pavilion - prime space among other DB&C/S W exhibitors - and receive a 20% discount. Be among the M players and make our presence known. Reach over 21,000 attendees. Call MTA and reserve your space today.

In a continued effort to reward students who perform outstanding M Technol-

ogy research, the Michael Distaso Memorial Fund Student Research Award will again be presented to a deserving student at the 1996 MTA Annual Conference in Boston. (See announcement on the inside back cover of this issue.) The following members and friends have recently contributed to this fund: Ed DeMoel, Don Kowaleski, Yun Sik Kwak, Robert Macauley, Alexander Mikhaylov, Chris Read, Rosemary Rupp, Esa Soini, Terry Tanous, and Ichiro Wakai. Please consider a gift to the fund.

Keep your contacts up-to-the-minute with these electronic addresses for M(UMPS) related information:

MTA1994@aol.com

Internet Newsgroup - comp.lang.mumps

ftp: mvb.saic.com (login as anonymous, password mdc)

ftp: vets.vetmed.missouri.edu (login as anonymous, password=your email address)

http://www.se.saic.com/mdc

InterSystems
http://www.intersys.com
support@intersys.com

Micronetics
info@rios.mnetx.com
Compuserve Forum under GO MUMPS

Nominations for the MTA Board of Directors are being accepted. Positions open include: Chair, Executive Director and two At-Large seats. Presently holding these offices are: Chair-John Covin, Executive Director-Catherine Pfeil, and At-Large members John M. McCormick and Susan A. Schluederberg. Contact Maureen Lilly at MTA for more information.   M