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CSD380

Module 6 Assignment

Strangler Pattern at Blackboard Learn (2011)

What problem were they facing?

By 2011 the Learn team was saddled with a 14-year-old J2EE monolith that still hid pockets of Perl code. Build and integration tests took 24-36 hours, and repository statistics showed that lines-of-code in the monolith kept climbing while commit counts fell. An objective signal that shipping any change was becoming painfully hard.

The Intervention

In 2012, their Chief Architect David Ashman launched an initiative to resolve this problem and enable future development. Using Martin Fowler's strangler pattern, they created a separate environment they called "Building Blocks" where new functionality was moved behind stable APIs without the weight of the legacy monolith. Developers quickly preferred to work in the new environment where they didn't have to manage the complexity of the adding to the legacy codebase. The feedback loop was faster and safer, and the overall commit frequency went up. Overall code quality rose.

Lessons Learned

- Measure the pain. Understanding repository trends and build times gave quantitative proof that change was needed.
- The strangler pattern lets you ship value continuously while hollowing out the monolith.
- Make the right path easy.
- Stable, versioned APIs are safety rails. This prevents new code from re-entangling itself with the old code.

Sources

The DevOps Handbook 2nd. Ed - Chapter 13