

Challenges and Solutions in Testing Mainframe Applications in Modern Banking

Ashwini Shivarudra
Independent Researcher, USA.



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ABSTRACT

Because the foundation of their operations is still housed in legacy systems, banks continue to use them. Banks must modify their systems to remain competitive in light of the swift changes in technology and customer needs. Mainframe systems have been an integral part of corporate computing for many years, enabling critical applications across a range of industries, including banking, retail, and healthcare. There is rising interest in leveraging Application Programming Interfaces (APIs) to expose these old apps' data and features, hence accelerating the construction of new applications and maximising their capability and enabling their reuse. Nonetheless, there are several obstacles to overcome in the process of locating and making available APIs for various business use cases. In this study, we examine the difficulties involved in developing APIs for mainframe systems that are no longer in use and suggest a unique architecture to enable communication for a range of use cases. We performed a qualitative poll with nine mainframe developers, whose average experience was fifteen years, to evaluate the efficacy of our methodology. We were able to determine which APIs were candidates and how long it would take to implement them for two industry mainframe applications and the public mainframe application GENAPP thanks to the poll. We create a list of artefacts, such as screens, transactions, business rules, inter-micro service calls, control flow blocks, and data accesses, in order to identify APIs. IBM Watsonx Code Assistant for Z Refactoring Assistant includes an implementation for computing API signatures. We proved the practicality of our technique by running the discovered APIs on an IBM Z mainframe system to assess their accuracy.

Keywords- Banks, Mainframe System, GENAPP, Application Programming Interfaces (APIs), Legacy Mainframe, Control Flow Blocks, Z Mainframe System, Banking, Retail, and Healthcare.

I. INTRODUCTION

Mainframe systems continue to be an essential part of corporate computing because of their outstanding performance, stability, and dependability in sectors including banking, retail, insurance, and healthcare. However, there is a growing tendency towards the "APIfication" of mainframe systems due to the growing popularity of cloud computing and micro services. Over 90% of financial institutions either use or intend to utilise APIs to increase income from current clients, according to McKinsey & Co in 2021 [1, 2]. Using solutions like zOS Connect, mainframe APIfication entails modernising systems by providing data and functions through APIs (application programming interfaces) [2]. This change has several advantages:

1. Increased Efficiency: Faster development cycles and lower operating expenses result from developers'

increased ease and efficiency when interacting with mainframe systems [2, 3].

2. Integration with Modern Technologies: APIfication makes it easier to integrate older technology with more modern ones, such as cloud computing, AI, and the Internet of Things (IoT).

3. Access Control Flexibility: Fine-grained security controls may be implemented and improved access management is made possible by opening up mainframe systems through APIs.

4. Business Agility: APIfication promotes agility by enabling quick reactions to shifting business requirements and empowering enhanced analytics [3]. Additionally, developing APIs for fresh applications creates new commercial prospects.

Adopting z-Cloud integration patterns, however, may be hampered by the need for skilled mainframe developers to invest a great deal of time and energy in

creating the proper APIs. Innovation is necessary to automate API generation, increasing its efficiency and lowering the cognitive burden and effort in order to handle issues.

Organisations now rely more and more on information systems, or "systems," since the advent of computing [3, 4]. Because of this, some organisations have amassed huge portfolios over time that include hundreds or even thousands of distinct systems. Many of these systems would have been created from the ground up to specifically handle the needs in a certain functional area, such stock control, people, and accounting. But this functional orientation [5] has a tendency to strengthen departmental silos inside the company, creating disjointed "islands of applications" where different systems are isolated from one another. Notably, modern enterprise business solutions like e-business, supply chain management, and customer relationship management have not often benefited from such an approach since they necessitate close information and process integration across several organisational divisions [5, 6].

This conundrum is further limited by the fact that recent entrants into the banking industry have already opened up new platforms that allow applications for round-the-clock online, internet, mobile, and other banking services. Because replacing old systems would be expensive and risky, and because a proprietary system would go bankrupt if a change were to occur, legacy systems are still in use today [8]. There's yet another explanation that has to do with business logic. The development of the apps began in the 1970s, and they were gradually modified to meet commercial needs. As a result, the systems' business logic is highly complicated, which increases the likelihood that it will fail if they are replaced [8, 9].

An analyst at Tower Group stated in 2008 that pressure was coming from both the commercial and technological perspectives. Rivals are employing new open architectures with data mining capabilities, smart report generation, and integration capabilities with tablets, laptops, and smartphones, among other things [9, 10]. This facilitates faster company closing and provides an improved mechanism for decision-making. Since the business and technical communities brought up these concerns [11, 12], big businesses have created services-oriented architecture, or SOA.

Furthermore, cloud computing-based solutions are provided by these suppliers. The dilemma at hand is whether banks need to upgrade their current legacy systems, develop new ones from the ground up, or purchase solutions from other suppliers [12]. We must be aware of the limitations imposed by the continued usage of the legacy systems in order to properly answer this question:

— Legacy systems were not intended to stay in operation for very long—more than 15 years—and were instead created to meet immediate demands;

— These systems were constructed with certain limitations (e.g., low cost, resource availability, etc.);

— Aspects of current systems include commercial components, corporate objectives, complexity, and [11, 12].

Rewriting the program is hazardous (many problems may surface during acceptance testing, and more importantly, the business may change during development) and costly (time consuming). The benefit is that the software program may be customised by the bank to match its unique needs [12]. Purchasing ready-to-use commercial off-the-shelf (COTS) systems that require customisation for the bank's operations is the second alternative. The risks are associated with maintaining such items since they often come with greater modification expenses [12]. The benefits include the software's instant use and the ability to create Service Level Agreements (SLAs) for support services.

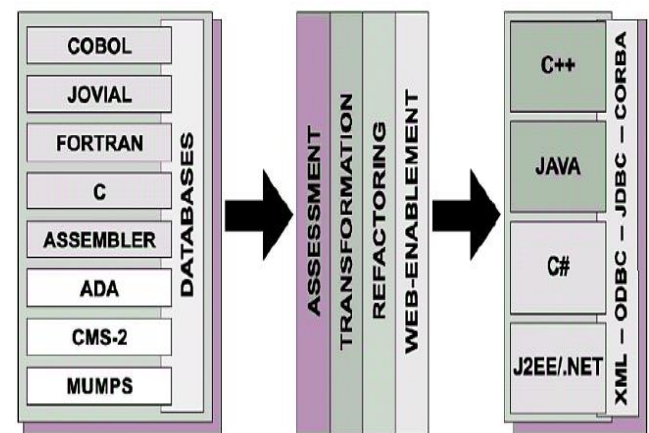


Figure. 1 Actions to transform legacy systems. [12, 13]

1.1 Mainframe

The mainframe computer has long been a myth. They have been there since the beginning of computers and are still around today in improved form. But in the face of cloud computing, mainframes appear destined to completely fade into the very specialised market in which they were once dominant. Right now, having a mainframe already is its greatest benefit. If you don't already have one, there's really no incentive to get one [13, 14], as cloud computing offers options that are nearly always far more affordable. The total control over their own data that mainframes provide big businesses is one of its advantages [13].

The advantages of moving to the cloud would likely be outweighed by the expense of transferring hundreds of thousands of lines of code [13, 14]. Furthermore, because the hardware is user-controlled, mainframes may be more specialised and customised than cloud services. The fact that mainframe computers are unaffected by your internet connection is advantageous as it conserves bandwidth and makes using them convenient even when the internet is unavailable [14].

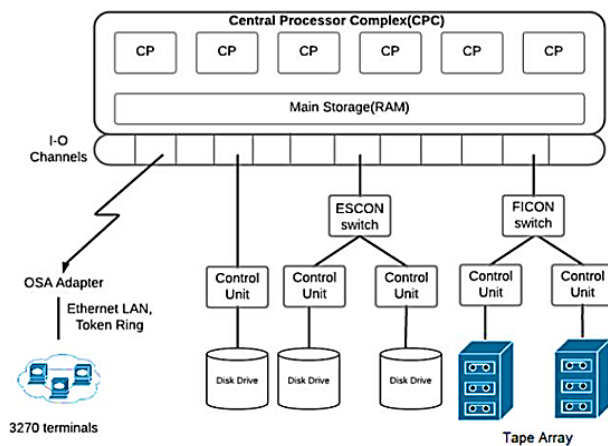


Figure 2: The CPC system. [14]

1.2 Early technological innovations and Mainframes

1.2.1 Doing Business with Information Technology

As of the beginning of the twenty-first century, almost every major corporation in the world has an information technology department, and very few still run their operations without using technology. Nevertheless, a lot of industries, particularly the banking sector, have extremely outdated applications that they still rely on [13]. This industry was one of the first to use computers in their business models, and even though the first practical use of computers was more than 30 years ago, some of these corporations still rely on this outdated code for mission-critical tasks [13, 14].

1.2.2 The Mainframe as the preferred early platform

These early programs were almost often written in PL/I or COBOL and were executed on the mainframe platform. These computers might supply a central server from which several terminals could run applications in a dependable and safe manner [14, 15]. In those early days, the mainframe was more than capable of meeting the needs of the banking industry since it could deliver the several applications required to carry out the institution's core operations in a secure and dependable manner.

1.2.3 Currently using these outdated apps

The needs of modern business, which has drastically altered from these early days of information technology, are something that many banking institutions that employed the mainframe and its applications for must now confront [15]. These organisations must choose how to redesign or reengineer the "legacy applications" in order to give the software solutions that modern consumer's want [16].

II. THE BANKING SECTOR'S NEED FOR TECHNOLOGY

2.1 The Banking Manufacturing's Nature

In the modern global economy, a bank's function is constantly evolving. A bank's traditional functions

included protecting funds and valuables, granting loans, and providing credit and payment services like money orders, cashier's checks, and checking accounts [15]. However, as the banking sector gradually becomes more deregulated, banks are also providing additional investments and insurance products, which they were previously not allowed to sell [16].

2.1.1 Industrial Use of Technological

The banking industry has been conducting business mostly through information technology for a some now [16]. Automated Teller Machines (ATMs) have made it possible for customers to access their accounts around-the-clock and perform many of the ordinary banking activities that were formerly performed in person by tellers, such as making deposits and withdrawals [16, 17]. Businesses and governments can electronically move funds into other accounts by using direct deposit options. When a debit card or "smart card" is swiped via a machine at a retail cash register, money is immediately taken out of the account [17]. Ultimately, bill payment and money transfers between accounts are made possible via phone and, increasingly, online electronic banking [17, 18].

III. NEW TECHNOLOGY-RELATED DIFFICULTIES

Systems that are more functional, accessible, and offer all of the aforementioned services with improved security and performance are necessary in the ever-demanding global world of today. Furthermore, each new program must include Graphical User Interfaces (GUIs), which demand additional processing power [18]. The present high rate of process reengineering combined with these additional expectations is pushing the limitations of existing systems. With the introduction of the Internet, e-commerce, online banking, Wireless Application Protocol (WAP), GUIs, Object Orientated Analysis and Design (OOAD), and Wireless Application Protocol (WAP), there are further pressures to shift away from previous technologies [18, 19]. In addition, information technology (IT) systems must frequently be integrated as part of business takeovers and mergers. When these factors come together, older systems find themselves in a situation where they are unable to advance and make the necessary adjustments. List a few of the dangers that businesses face as a result of the rapid advancements in technology. Among them are:

- The need for constant updating of information arises from the quick changes in markets [19], which raises the price of market intelligence.
- Selling novel technological items carries a higher chance of failure in the marketplace
- Investing in information technology entails significant fixed costs. This cost is further increased by

[19], security, performance, interoperability, and equipment depreciation. Lastly, the financial foundation needed for business IT solutions might be quite large.

- The interaction between technology and the human user introduces a human restriction.

The bank most likely obtained consumer data from a third-party ad tech aggregator system, which it then used to target the client. This ad tech company is scuffing data from a variety of sources, including the internet, users' browser histories, and, if turned on, their geolocation data. Subsequently, the bank is blasting out emails to every prospect who could wind up becoming a customer via a marketing system. A web application is being used by Thank Bank to create a website where customers may apply for accounts. The bank then uses the identification and income verification system of a government agency to confirm the customer's identity [19, 20]. The client's profile is being created by the bank in the CRM, or the client relationship management system. To create the account number while opening the bank account, the bank uses a Core banking system [20]. It employs a dispatch system for statements and letters to provide clients with regulatory data, such as notices and statement. Thus, in this simple case study of the customer journey, the data is passing via nine different distributed systems. previously a single monolithic program could have handled and simplified them. However, a monolithic application is limited in its ability to pull data from other systems only if those systems were not developed using the same technology stack or, as in this example, from the same particular vendor [19].

3.1 Distributed vs. Monolithic Organisations

With the introduction of mainframe computers, computer systems for widespread commercial usage began to evolve. Even though other businesses began producing similar systems, IBM's research and technological advancements allowed them to dominate the market. Early in the 1990s, PC use changed the landscape with the commercialisation of the operating system Windows and the widespread adoption of the Unix/Linux operational system [20, 21]. The distributed software systems were developed using code written in languages like C, C++, Java7, etc. [21] and were based on standard PC hardware. They were able to create software solutions that met a variety of reasonably priced corporate demands. Distributed computing gained popularity as a result of the democratisation of PCs. There was a great need to connect these systems for the exchange of data that could improve the user experience in many ways, even though distributed software systems met the needs of a wide range of businesses and essentially generated a more instinctive and user-friendly experiences that is not just limited to computers and scientists [20, 21].

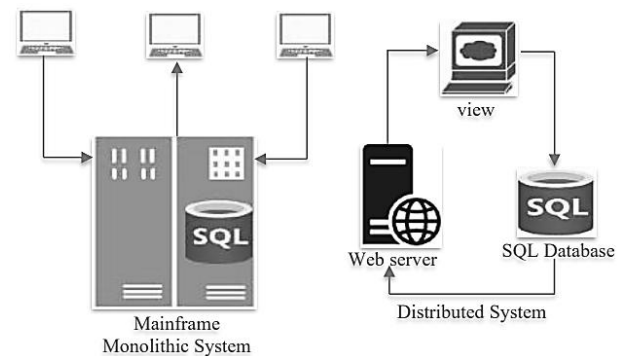


Figure. 3 A logical diagram showing the differences between distributed and monolithic systems. [20]

3.1.1 Identifying Potential APIs Automatically

Our approach entails creating an exhaustive inventory of all artefacts found in the program, including as screens, transactions, control flow blocks, inter-micro service calls, company regulations, data accesses, and others, in order to locate APIs in mainframe systems [20, 21].

- 1. Transactions and Jobs:** Transactions and jobs are the usual places where mainframe programs begin their functions, and these may be utilised to find potential APIs [21, 22]. SSC1 for customer management, for instance, and SSP1, SSP2, SSP3, and SSP4 for housing, motor, [22, 23], endowment, and commercial policy management, respectively, are the five primary transactions of GENAPP. Program LGTESTP1, the initial program that SSP1 calls, is where we start the API identification process [23].

- 2. Control Flow Blocks:** Since crucial capabilities linked to initiating transactions are frequently found in essential control flow blocks, we take into consideration APIfying them [23, 24].

- 3. Data Access Points:** Code that accesses databases or files, loads variables, resolves errors, and any code that comes before or after may all be made available as APIs. We provide Data APIs that support both dynamic and fixed queries, allowing users to pass in any SQL query as an argument to the API. In doing so, a micro service layer for data access is created [24].

- 4. Procedures as APIs:** Typically, procedures carry out essential corporate functions. The best candidates to be converted into APIs are stand-alone processes that represent individual business capabilities and do not call other procedures [24, 25]. For instance, operation GET-MOTOR-DB2-INFO in program LGIPDB01 of GENAPP accesses Policy and Motor tables and may be considered an API candidate [25, 26].

- 5. Screen Modernisation and Screen APIs:** In mainframe programs, screens are terminals that are used to view the menu. Through the parsing of text files including screen coordinates, we are able to deduce the fields needed for each capability. Each screen's functionalities may then be turned into an API [26, 27],

where input fields serve as requests and output fields serve as answers. Although APIfication makes screen scraping automated, we suggest isolating pertinent code and optimising it to cut down on pointless procedures [28].

6. Rules and Business Features as APIs: We suggest utilising technologies like to detect programs containing business rules. The required code will be extracted by our framework and hosted in decision managers like RedHat Decision Manager.

7. APIs for Communication between Micro Services: In a monolithic design, crossmicroservice function calls must be replaced by APIs to allow connectivity across candidate's micro services. The potential micro services' cross-micro services dependencies will be found using our framework as APIs [25, 26].

8. Application-based APIs from outside and customer demands: The needs of the client or the external method used to call the mainframe program might be used to identify APIs. Our methodology's automated approach to API identification will decrease the work needed to find the best API insertion places within mainframe programs and speed up interface discovery [26].

3.1.2 Locating API Signatures Automatically

COBOL applications frequently use copybooks, which specify Cobol's data structures, to call other programs. Nevertheless, a copybook may have a large number of fields, making it difficult to manually determine which elements would be requests and answers for API purposes. Here, we outline several techniques that are intended to mechanically recognise the API signature, which includes the request and response data [27, 28].

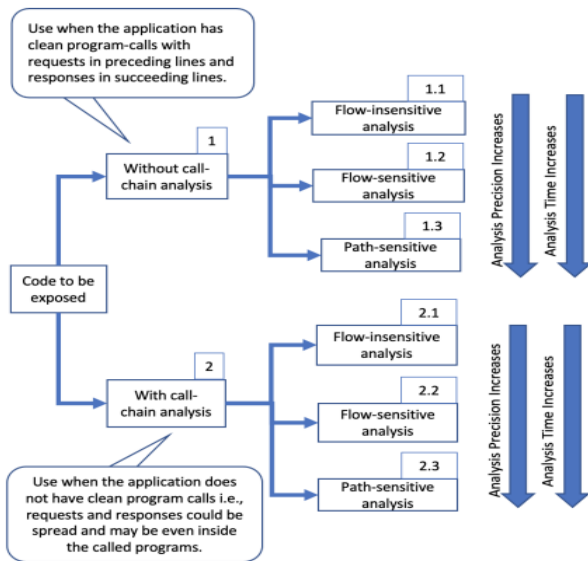


Figure. 4 Variants to use in calculating requests and answers. Combinations of flow sensitive, flow insensitive, path sensitive, and call chain analysis with or without. [28]

IV. EXPERIMENTAL AND QUALITATIVE STUDY

The IBM Watsonx Coding Assistant for Z Refactoring, also Assistant includes our API signature computation implementation. We have used flow-insensitive and flow-sensitive static evaluations in combination with call chain analyses both with and without. Since it can be very time- and resource-intensive, if not impossible, to analyse every potential control flow path for big, complicated software, we have not implemented the path-sensitive technique. In order to maintain secrecy, we used the GENAPP application, a private business application, and a public industry application called CBSA for our tests [26, 28]. Despite the industry's pervasive reliance on mainframes, there is a shortage of COBOL/mainframe developers, which made it difficult to conduct tests on mainframe computer systems and implement COBOL parsing in Python.

4.1 Evaluation of Automated vs. Manual API Identification

Below is a comparison of the manual and our suggested automated methods for GENAPP's APIfication.

- **Identification of Manual APIs:** We worked with five SMEs (subject matter experts) who had 10 years of experience on average [28, 29]. They were knowledgeable in APIfication, mainframe modernisation, and had a solid grasp of the GENAPP code. In the GENAPP usage, the SMEs manually identified 10 data-accessing APIs and 15 transaction-based APIs.
- **Identification of APIs Automatically:** Leveraging our automated methodology, our system identified 15 transaction-based APIs, 21 procedure-based APIs that do not involve data access, and 21 data accessing APIs [25].

Table 1: Analysis of the four variations of Calculating Request and Response Times in Seconds.

API	Without call		With call chain	
	FI	FS	FI	FS
TI	19.65	25.64	49.86	125.69
TA	25.65	41.56	120.99	485.22
TU	48.96	27.96	168.92	541.65
DI	29.68	29.89	16.59	29.65
DA	28.96	23.59	14.95	21.56
DU	26.98	24.96	19.95	21.69

Table 2 Number of Fields for Requests and Respond Using the Four Computational Variants for Working Storage + Linkage Sections.

API	Without call		With call chain	
	FI	FS	FI	FS
TI	14.59	21.65	21.59	15.54
TA	21.59	22.54	22.26	21.65
TU	19.85	26.54	29.65	26.55

DI	11.69	21.54	22.69	21.65
DA	14.52	21.59	25.59	21.25
DU	11.54	26.59	21.69	19.65

Table 3 Count of Request and Reply Fields Using the Four Computational Variants.

API	Without call chain		With call chain	
	FI	FS	FI	FS
API 1	9	1	5	4
API 2	6	5	4	5
API 3	15	16	16	6
API 4	28	24	122	14
API 5	30	39	219	119

4.1.1 Describing the Requirement for Automatic APIfication

Because of the complexity and scale of the data-stores involved, it is imperative to automate the process of recognising requests and answers in mainframe systems [26, 28]. Large data-stores that are frequently defined by mainframe applications and shared amongst programs make it difficult and error-prone to manually identify pertinent queries and answers.

Table 4 Execution Duration (seconds) for client-side calls to GENAPP API exposing on an IBM mainframe.

API	TIME
Find more about a customer claim's automobile policy.	0.58
A customer's motor policy is added.	0.96
Update a customer's automobile insurance.	0.41
Find out the business policy of a client.	0.66
Find out about a customer's claim's housing policy.	0.28
Get information about a customer's endowment policy.	0.61
Ask customers if they have any claims.	0.98
Find out a customer's insurance number.	0.84

4.1.2 Qualitative Study

Nine practitioners with an average of almost fifteen years of work experience participated in our qualitative research. These professionals have a great foundation in APIfication and Mainframe application development, and they are well-versed in the difficulties involved in these operations [29, 30]. A few of them have also worked directly with clients in a variety of sectors, including banking, retail, insurance, and travel. We gave the practitioner access to both the private industry application and GENAPP during the research. Then, we posed certain queries to them concerning the process of manually identifying API endpoints and calculating their signatures. We specifically asked [29] about any obstacles

they faced and the amount of time needed to finish these chores by hand [30].

V. CONCLUSION

Owing to the quick advancements in hardware and software, the banking industry strives to keep up with emerging trends. Banks concentrate on replacing outdated software with more recent versions of their programs. In this article, we suggest an all-inclusive architecture for mainframe application APIfication automation. Our method computes API signatures and extracts APIs properly by using approaches from static program analysis. Through building, we verify that our procedures are proper. Using tests and a qualitative research on two industrial mainframe applications and a public mainframe application (GENAPP), we show the scalability and efficacy of our methodology. The findings demonstrate that, in comparison to manual approaches, our automated methodology greatly shortens the time needed for API identification and API signature computation. We also successfully run a portion of our candidate APIs on an IBM Z mainframe system, demonstrating the usefulness of our methodology in real-world situations. All things considered, our suggested framework offers a scalable and effective way to deal with the difficulties associated with mainframe APIfication and makes it easier to convert mainframe programs into contemporary, micro services-based architectures.

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