

Rethinking mainframe modernization

Aligning core systems to
future-ready hybrid, AI-led
operations and modern
delivery models



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Introduction

The modernization imperative

Modernization has entered a new era — defined not by migration off the legacy platforms, but by strategic reinvention of core systems to operate within a hybrid, AI-led environment. For decades, the mainframe has served as the computational heart of industries that demand uncompromising performance, resilience, and security.

In the present day, mainframes continue to process the world's financial transactions, safeguard national systems and support high-volume industrial platforms, unmatched in durability and deterministic performance. Yet enterprises increasingly operate in a world where:

- **Hybrid cloud is the standard:** IT functions are distributed, containerized, and API-driven
- **AI is fast becoming the new foundational fabric:** From code generation to workload optimization, predictive incident management, to customer interactions, AI is altering how systems operate.
- **Regulation is constantly evolving:** Compliance, data residency, and privacy expectations have intensified.
- **Developer expectations have changed:** IT teams expect cloud-like tooling, Git-centric workflows, automation-first pipelines, and integrated DevSecOps experiences

Given the evolving backdrop, modernization is an urgent imperative, much beyond a technology refresh or a cost-saving exercise.

It is a strategic re-alignment of the mainframe within the enterprise's wider digital, cloud, AI, and operational ecosystem.

**98%
of mainframe
organizations planning
modernization in the
next five years and
82% prioritizing
deeper AI integration.**

Source: IDC Spotlight: Organizations Are Modernizing Mainframe Environments to Tap Multiple Benefits, Dec 2025



The state of the mainframe in 2026 and beyond

The mainframe's continued relevance is built on its architectural design: high I/O throughput, workload isolation, near-perfect reliability, and decades of optimization for business-critical transactions.

Yet the ecosystem around it has fundamentally changed. Modern enterprises now operate on concurrently evolving platforms — microservices, cloud-native applications, distributed data lakes, API-first environments, and edge computing systems.

A platform that cannot stand still

The mainframe is no longer the isolated “center” around which other systems circulate. Instead, it must function as a high-value node within a distributed, hybrid topology. The assumption that the mainframe can remain unchanged while the rest of IT modernizes is no longer tenable.

Hybrid integration as the new fabric

Organizations are building architectures that span:

- Cloud platforms (AWS, Azure, GCP)
- AI-enabled platforms
- Kubernetes-based environments
- Mainframe and distributed computing
- Edge and industrial computing



In this model, the mainframe must integrate, interact, and interoperate — not through batch-based file transfers or proprietary protocols, but through APIs, virtualization layers, and advanced automation.

This is the fundamental modernization shift: from isolation to integration.

Understanding the modernization barriers

Despite its urgency, modernization remains difficult. Enterprises are held back by several technical, structural, cultural and economic barriers.

Technical debt accumulated over decades

- Decades-old COBOL code with limited documentation
- Interwoven batch dependencies
- Proprietary tooling with high switching costs



Operational barriers

- Risk of service disruption
- Legacy processes tied to organizational workflows

Organizational barriers

- Competing modernization priorities
- Inadequate executive sponsorship
- Misalignment between business and IT modernization agendas

Economic barriers

- Spike in ISV licensing
- Ambiguity of long-term ROI
- Fear of “big bang” transformation costs

These constraints explain why modernization is not straightforward; enterprises need a phased, controlled, risk-proof approach that balances reliability with progress.

Mainframe modernization - key drivers

Modernization drivers are no longer confined to cost reduction or system upgrades. They are anchored in large-scale business shifts.

1

The need for digital fluidity

Enterprises need to extend core business logic — often encoded in COBOL and PL/I — into digital channels. Modern customer journeys require data and application logic to be accessible and usable by cloud-native microservices, mobile channels, analytics platforms, and AI systems. Without modernization, core logic remains trapped in monolithic structures that cannot support real-time integration.

2

Developer productivity and talent transformation

The new generation developers are not trained on green-screen tooling or 1980s-era development workflows. Modernization introduces modern IDEs, Git workflows, DevOps orchestration, automated testing, and collaborative engineering models. This shift is essential for workforce sustainability.

3

Economic governance and cost transparency

Mainframe tooling costs have escalated by 100–300% after vendor consolidation. The shift toward consumption-based models, including MFaaS, is a direct response to the demand for predictable economics and operating elasticity.

* IDC Spotlight: Organizations Are Modernizing Mainframe Environments to Tap Multiple Benefits, Dec 2025

**Cognizant MFaaS, Dec 2025

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AI integration as a competitive differentiator

Without mainframe modernization, enterprises cannot fully leverage AI's potential, because the data, business rules, and logic locked in legacy systems remain inaccessible or unstructured. AI use cases mainly include:

- Automated code translation
- Predictive operations
- Fraud detection and risk scoring
- Intelligent claims and underwriting workflows
- ChatOps and cognitive developer assistants

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Cyber resilience and regulatory evolution

Security expectations have evolved:

- Continuous compliance
- Real-time telemetry
- Automated patching

Legacy mainframe operating patterns cannot align with these expectations without modernization.

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The Cognizant–IBM partnership

Designed to help enterprises modernize with confidence and govern with accountability

For over two decades, Cognizant and IBM have cultivated a trusted partnership, delivering measurable value through joint innovation, deep technology expertise, and a shared focus on solving complex business challenges.

To help navigate today's fast-evolving landscape, Cognizant and IBM combine their strengths to deliver a cohesive transformation strategy that reshapes the enterprise IT modernization journey at every layer.

Our shared vision

By uniting Cognizant's consulting and engineering prowess expertise with IBM's hybrid-cloud, automation, and AI leadership, the alliance establishes a blueprint for modernization as a continuous enterprise discipline. Together, we empower clients to:

- **Modernize with AI**—transform legacy systems with generative intelligence and automation
- **Optimize with insight**—create transparency, predictability, and performance across hybrid-cloud environments
- **Innovate with responsibility**—embed transparency, fairness, and compliance across the AI lifecycle

This vision shifts modernization from an end goal to an ongoing process, where enterprises continually adapt through intelligence, effective management, and teamwork. By bringing together intelligent automation, decisions based on data, and financial discipline, Cognizant and IBM enable organizations to achieve sustainable business resilience and innovation.

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The Cognizant-IBM mainframe modernization framework

Cognizant and IBM have built a modernization ecosystem that addresses the complexities of large-scale enterprise environments—a multi-dimensional framework that spans architecture, engineering, operations, optimization, and financial governance. It includes four approaches:



Cognizant Skygrade™

A core pillar of Cognizant's modernization portfolio, Skygrade applies AI and automation to integrate mainframes with cloud-native environments. It also streamlines management of on-premises and edge



Cognizant Flowsource™

A gen AI-driven solution built to modernize mainframe software delivery end-to-end. It automates and unifies key stages of the development life cycle, lifting quality, security, and compliance while improving cross-team throughput. The result: faster development cycles and significantly shorter time-to-market.



SDLC

Enables mainframe teams to automatically extract and codify application knowledge, reducing the effort and cost of ongoing development. It also accelerates the modernization of complex mainframe estates, including applications written in COBOL.



IBM

Cognizant and IBM offer mainframe clients a comprehensive portfolio to advance their modernization goals. Cognizant contributes deep consulting, implementation, and managed services expertise to help organizations adopt and optimize IBM's mainframe technologies—including platforms designed to infuse AI and connect mainframes seamlessly with hybrid cloud environments.

MFaaS (Mainframe-as-a-Service)

The modernization of mainframe environments increasingly depends on how enterprises choose to operate them — not only how they engineer or optimize them. Over the last decade, cost pressure, rising software licensing complexity, and talent shortages have shifted the conversation from “How do we modernize the platform?” to “How do we modernize the way we consume the platform?”

Cognizant’s Mainframe-as-a-Service (MFaaS) model represents this shift. It reframes mainframe computing from an owned asset with fixed lifecycle costs into a consumption-aligned service, offering **transparent price models, predictable performance, and modernization-ready operations**.

Cognizant’s team and capabilities have earned top client’s trust in modernization

10,000+
mainframe
application services
professionals

500+
mainframe
customers

400+
mainframe
architects

916,000+
MIPS (52% only
infra support)

750+ mainframe
infrastructure services
professionals

Mainframe services expertise

- Consulting
- In platform modernization
- Maintenance & enhancements
- Re-platform/ re-engineer
- Mainframe hosting
- Infrastructure engineering
- Testing
- Industry & platform-based services
- System engineering & upgrade

Partner ecosystem (150+ ISVs)



Proven capability

Over 40+ Cognizant proprietary
modernization accelerators

Strong investments in skill development

In-house mainframe & access to partner
labs for training & technology pilots

Rich experience

In domain-specific commercial
products

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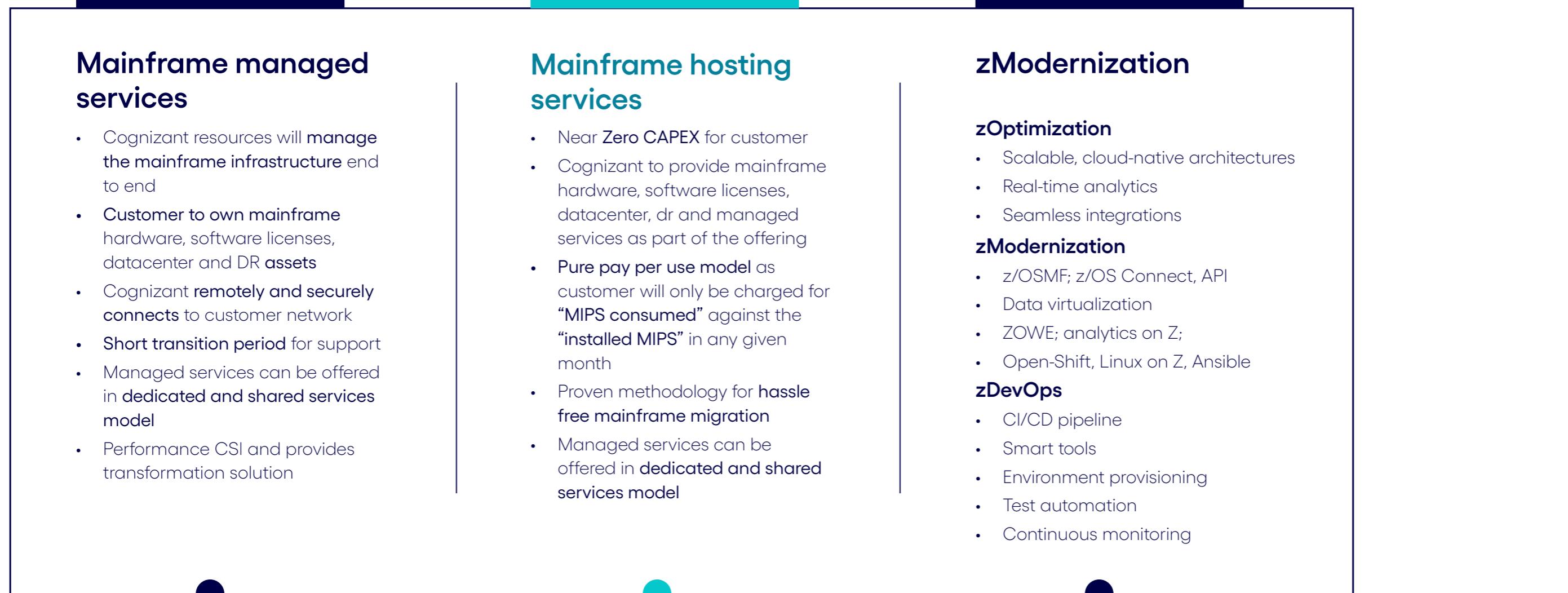
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Cognizant's MFaaS: An end-to-end modernization service stack

Enterprises modernize most effectively when operations, infrastructure, and transformation are well aligned. Cognizant's mainframe services portfolio is organized around three core pillars: managed operations, hosting services, and modernization. Together, these offerings give enterprises a structured way to stabilize their current environments, shift to flexible consumption models, and introduce modernization.

A unified view of Cognizant's mainframe service offerings



MFaaS enterprise service catalog

Production control

1 Output management

Reporting, CA-view & deliver

2 Software configuration management

Staging programs/code from non-prod to prod environment; Endevor; ChangeMan; Panvalet

3 Batch job scheduling

Managing the job schedule using tools like CA7Control-M, ESP

4 Batch monitoring

Batch job monitoring and abend fixing, restart related activities

5 Console monitoring

Monitoring the system console, perform IPL, L1 troubleshooting & escalating L2 issues to system admin team



System administration

6 Server administration, operating systems support

HW & LPAR config, z/OS, z/VM, z/Linux

7 Database management

DB Software support, logical & physical DBA support, performance tuning and data sharing support; DB2/IMS/ADABASE/ DATACOM

8 Transaction processing and PCM; middleware

OLTP (CICS/IMS) support, WebSphere MQ administration; capacity planning & performance management

9 Storage management and security support

DASD, tape management, backup & recovery strategy, RACF/ACF2/top secret; security audits

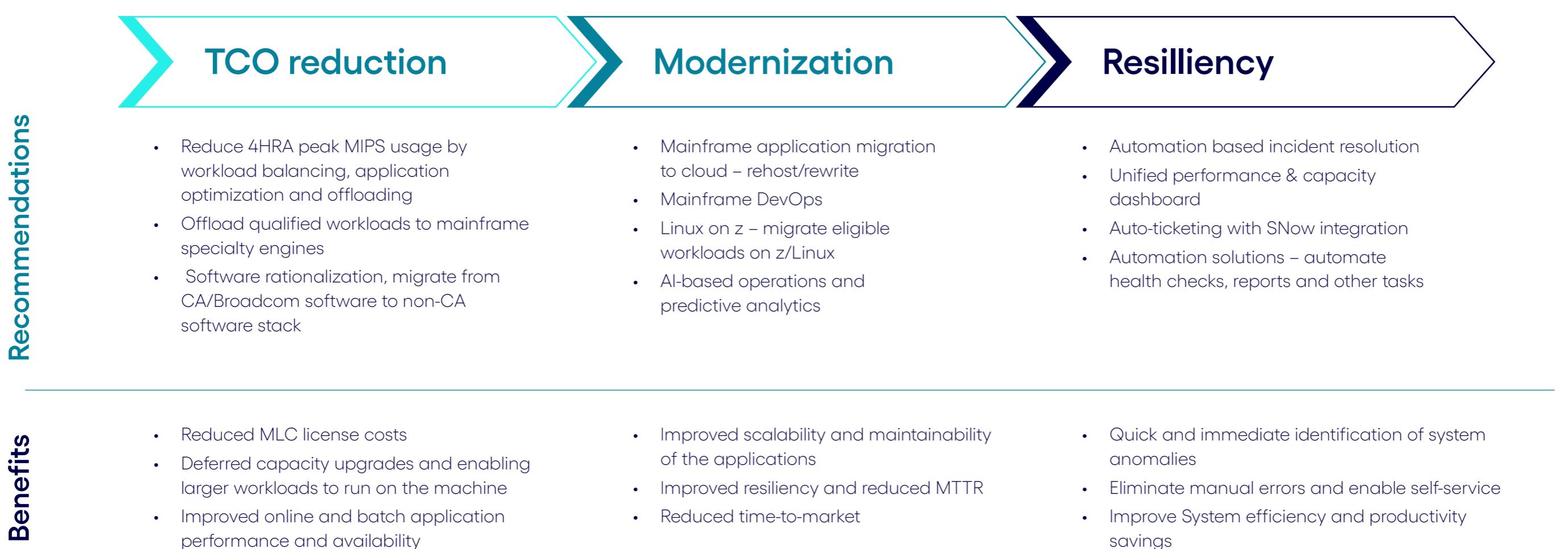
10 Communication server and DR support

Network support; VTAM/SNA, Netview, disaster recovery plan, test & execution

Cognizant and IBM mainframe transformation services

Reducing TCO, modernizing workloads, and strengthening system resiliency are the three main levers for mainframe transformation, enabling enterprises to achieve fast, measurable operational impact.

Mainframe transformation levers



Batch optimization service

Improving throughput, stability, and cost efficiency

Batch processing remains one of the most persistent bottlenecks in large mainframe environments. Batch workloads often slow down mainframe operations when traffic peaks, schedules are tight or dependencies pile up, impacting both cost and availability.

Cognizant's batch optimization service addresses this directly by combining assessment, modernization, and tuning techniques to improve throughput, remove unnecessary workload, and create additional headroom during peak windows.



Standardization

- Understanding on batch landscape and flow documentation
- Removal of unwanted job, file and time dependency (schedule review)
- Obsolete job removal
- Job priority review



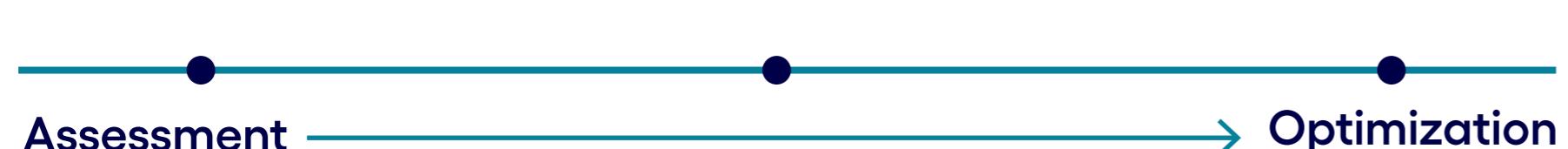
Modernization

- Data in memory
- RLS - eliminate online dependency
- Automation of batch incident resolution



Optimization

- Application tuning
- Sub-system tuning (file & DB)
- Redundant/unwanted process removal
- Pareto analysis on job ABENDS
- Moving non-critical job outside the peak window



Key objectives

- Optimize the batch applications with SLA and throughput issues
- Streamline the batch schedule with appropriate dependency and priority
- Modernize batch for efficient resource usage, improved availability and predictability
- Flatten the peak to create more headroom by re-arranging non-critical batch outside the peak window

Key benefits

- Compliance with critical batch SLAs/ business goals
- Create headroom for the batch schedules to accommodate the business growth
- Increased online application availability
- Reduced MIPS usage of the batch workload
- Refined batch inventory for easy schedule analysis

Batch optimization approach

Due diligence

- Understand job flow and its functionality
- Identify appropriate test environment for proof-of-concept and test run
- Validate the scope of analysis with SMEs and prepare engineering plan

Measurement

- Enable monitoring tools for required resource utilization reports
- Collect resource usage of the components identified
- Baseline the identified components in test
- Dynamic profile & monitor the identified jobs in production & test

Analysis

- Analyze job schedule, functional flow for optimization
- Analyze the profile reports, application design, code, redundant data processing and database calls to identify performance hotspots
- Perform proof-of-concepts for critical recommendations

Recommendation and implementation

- Validate and finalize recommendation with application SME
- Prepare implementation plan
- Support application team for implementation
- Measure the production metrics and report the savings

Mainframe DevOps

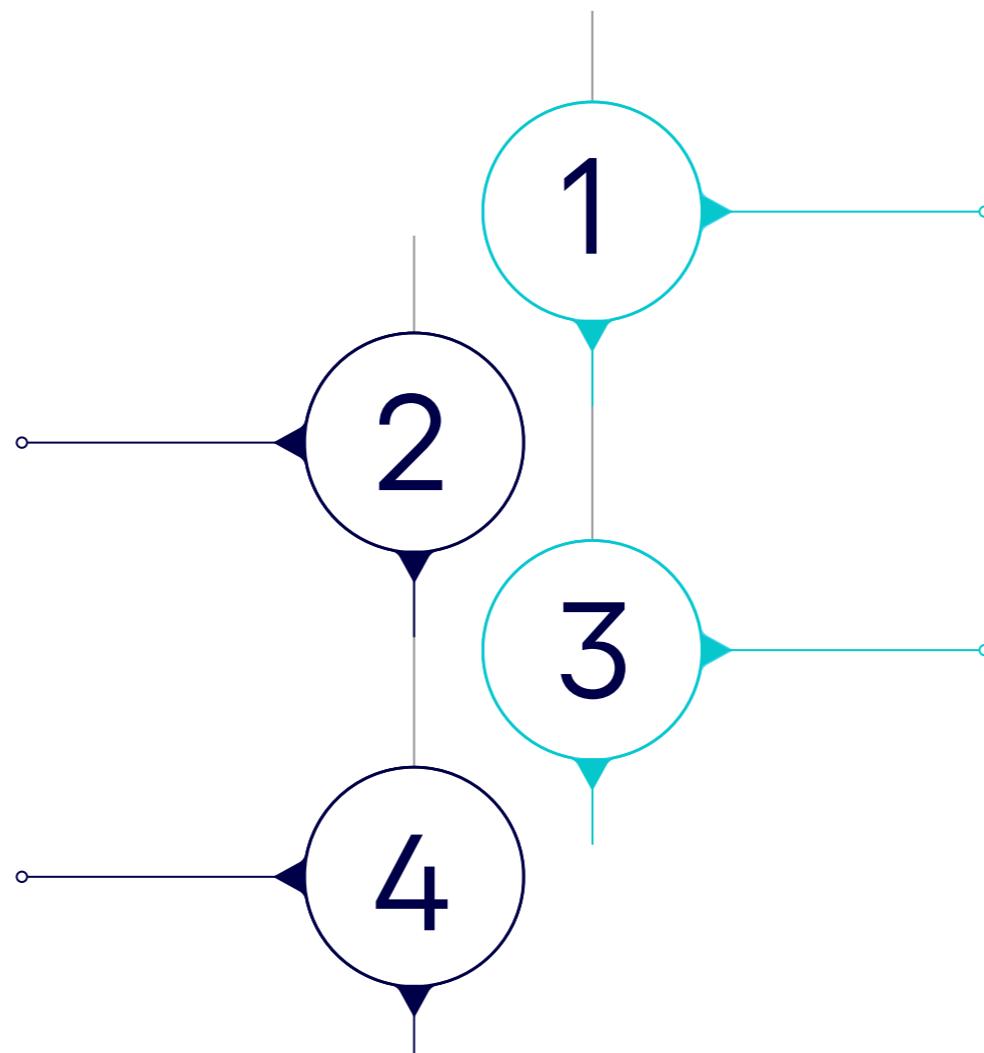
Accelerating speed, stability, and automation

DevOps on the mainframe is about making development faster, more reliable, and far less manual. This service brings modern engineering practices—such as automated builds, automated testing, smart tooling and continuous monitoring—into environments that have traditionally relied on slow, siloed processes.

By improving automation across delivery, testing, and environment provisioning, Cognizant helps enterprises reduce errors, shorten release cycles, and keep systems stable as changes move through the pipeline.

Continuous delivery

- Requirements traceability
- Parallel development
- Automated build and code review
- Code coverage analysis
- Automated deployment and approval
- Faster rollback and enhanced notifications
- Infra as a code: version control infra components



Continuous monitoring

- Environment stability
- Self healing services for repeated Abends
- Automated service request fulfilment

Smart tools and environments

- Automated environment provisioning
- Automated subsystem provisioning
- Impact analysis, dead code and inventory reports
- On demand visualization of application flow
- Integration with project management and other open source tools
- Artefacts sharing with the other teams

Shift left testing

- Automated unit and regression testing
- Service virtualization
- Advanced automated test data setup to ensure exhaustive coverage
- Test case reusability

Mainframe tool modernization

Ongoing consolidation in the mainframe software market has led many enterprises to reassess long-standing tool dependencies and renewal strategies. In response, cognizant and ibm provide a structured replacement and transition approach that helps organizations move to functionally equivalent alternatives ahead of contract cycles.

Drivers

Cost savings

- Licensing and maintenance costs
- Redundant tools
- Obsolete tools obtained as part of bundled package

Vendor lock-in

- Dependency and limiting flexibility
- Long-term IT strategies

Approach

Broadcom exit project

- Plan at least 18-24 months in advance
- Stakeholders' approvals

Modern technology stack

- Identify replacement software
- Include it application/ testing teams
- Test environment/lpar availability

Phased transition approach

- Discovery inventory
- Migration/implementation
- Training/enablement
- Governance/optimization

Outcomes

Cost reduction

- Competitive alternatives
- Consumption based pricing

Operational agility

- Reduce manual efforts with automated solutions
- Proven methodologies and migration strategies

Risk mitigation

- Phased transition
- Zero disruption
- Robust governance
- Training, and knowledge management

Our approach includes assessment, tool rationalization, phased migration, and operational stabilization—allowing enterprises to:

- Reduce licensing costs
- Simplify their software landscape
- Adopt a more flexible, modern stack
- Migrate seamlessly without disrupting core systems or day-to-day operations



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Case study 1 North American insurance company reaps significant savings with MFaaS

Overview

A leading North American insurance provider operating across life and retirement business lines partnered with Cognizant to reduce high mainframe operating costs and shift toward a more flexible consumption model.

The challenge

- The organization urgently needed a managed services approach that could stabilize operations, streamline batch and console activities, and build a clear path towards long-term cost efficiency
- Due to high TCO customer wanted to move towards as-a-Service model

Technology stack

- Hardware: IBM z15
- OS: z/OS V3R1
- MIPS: 152 MSU/1200 MIPS
- Transaction manager: CICS TS 6.1
- Messaging: MQ v 9.1
- Storage: IBM DS8950 & Dell DLM
- Security: RACF
- Database: DB2 v13
- Monitor: Mainview
- Automation: Tivoli System Automation (TSA)

The Solution

Cognizant transitioned the client to an end-to-end managed mainframe environment under a unified SLA framework. Batch and console operations were rationalized to strengthen window adherence and improve incident response.

Standardized procedures, health checks, and proactive monitoring were implemented across the environment. Automation was introduced for repetitive system tasks, including IPL checks, alerts, and DB2 utilities.

- To reduce costs and improve flexibility, the company shifted to Cognizant's consumption-based MFaaS model.
- Cognizant also assumed responsibility for the mainframe hardware, software stack, and supporting non-mainframe licenses.
- Continuous improvement practices were introduced, with a focus on automation, operational efficiency, and MIPS optimization.

Outcome

40% automation of recurring operational tasks leading reduced human errors and increased operational efficiency

~25% savings by moving to MFaaS model across deal term with significant cost savings in software licensing & support costs

97% to 100% patch compliance improvement

24x7 onsite-offshore support for mainframe infrastructure

Automated the License expiration tracking for all the ISV products

Case study 2 Mainframe DevOps enablement for a large financial services enterprise

Overview

A leading North American insurance provider, operating across life and retirement business lines, partnered with Cognizant to reduce high mainframe operating costs and shift toward a more flexible consumption model. The organization needed a managed services approach that could stabilize operations, streamline batch and console activities, and build a clear path toward long-term cost efficiency.

The challenge

A development project involving 300+ mainframe developers was underway. Key challenges included

- Multiple deployments into the integration test environment with no checks on code quality
- Manual build & deployments—reduced time to market, low productivity with high effort
- Deployment automation with a single pipeline for mainframe was urgently needed
- Leverage mainframe investments to keep pace with digital economy

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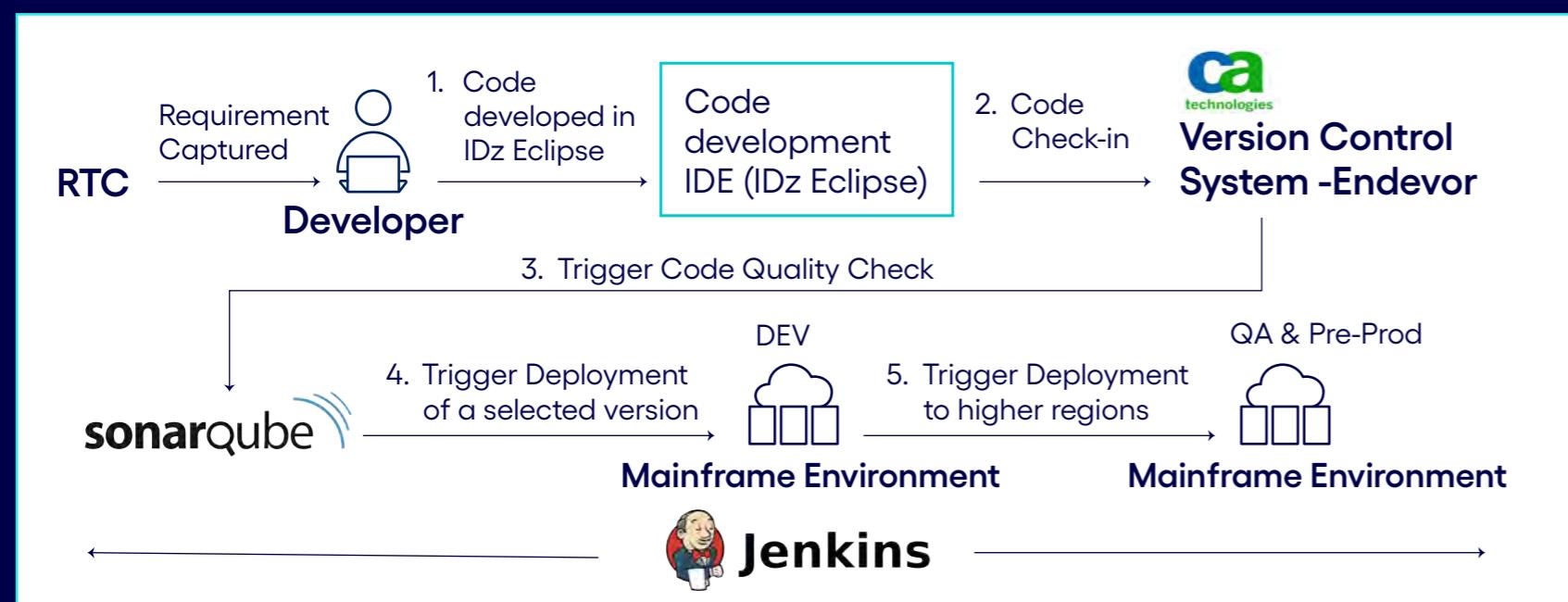
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The Solution

Cognizant introduced a mainframe DevOps model centred around continuous delivery, continuous monitoring, and shift-left testing. Automated build and code review pipelines were deployed, along with code coverage analysis and automated deployment workflows. Infrastructure components were version-controlled to support repeatability and rollback.

Environment provisioning and subsystem provisioning were automated to reduce setup time. Impact analysis, inventory reporting, and flow visualization tools increased transparency into application behavior. Shift-left testing enabled automated unit and regression testing, test data setup, and test case reuse to ensure more complete coverage earlier in the lifecycle.

CI/CD Pipeline



Technology stack

- IBM's IDz
- Jenkins
- Endevor Web services
- zOSMF
- Brightside's ZOWE CLI
- SonarQube & SonarLint

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Outcome

400+ mainframe applications implemented with CI/CD DevOps pipeline using Jenkins. IDz deployed with Sonarlint for the code quality check

Enforced quality gating

based on the SonarQube analysis and generated SonarQube reports. Code promotion is now allowed only if the source code passes the quality gating

1 day turnaround time for deployments is now automated and completed in minutes

~20% improvement in developer productivity

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Case study 3

Tool modernization for a large insurer enterprise mainframe estate

Overview

Escalating CA/Broadcom software renewal costs prompted a leading US Insurer to reassess its mainframe software stack. With licensing fees increasing by 100–300% in some cases, the organization sought a structured approach to replace CA/Broadcom products with equivalent alternatives before the next renewal cycle. Cognizant led the assessment, planning, and migration effort.

The challenge

- 30+ Broadcom products to be replaced for one of the US based Insurance Customer with 12 LPARs
- Ensure the application are not heavily modified due to the product migrations
- Smooth transition from Panvalet code promotion to ISPW
- Complete the migration in 24 months. (before next renewal).
- CA PRODUCT footprint was across Appdev, Reporting, Schedule management to Storage, Security

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The Solution

- **Key products under current migration phase**
 - Deliver - IBM Tivoli Output Manager
 - Panvalet - BMC ISPW
 - CA-7 - IBM IwZ
 - SYSVIEW - IBM Omegamon
 - ADSO/IDMS – COBOL/CICS/DB2
 - EASYTRIVE, DYL280 - COBOL
- **Analyzed the stack and identified all the Broadcom products running using IBM TADz.**
- **Identified the best suitable products for the customer requirements.**

Outcome

- 1 ~8 -10 Mn savings in current software licensing cost: saved the renewal costs of traditional products ranging 200% to 300% of current spend and the licensing model for a bundle license
- 2 Smooth exit of all products

Case study 4

Enterprise level TCO reduction for insurance provider

Overview

A major insurance organization launched a company-wide initiative to reduce its annual IT spend by 20% over four years. As part of this mandate, Cognizant was engaged to lower mainframe total cost of ownership (TCO) while improving capacity headroom and eliminating redundant software and processing workloads. The engagement focused on workload optimization, software rationalization, and targeted operational improvements.





Key highlights

- Optimized the workloads to reduce peak MIPS usage by 337 MIPS
- Workload balancing across LPARS
- Eliminated of less usage tools and redundant tools
- Restricting few reporting s/w to required LPARs
- Migration of limited application usage s/w's
- Vendor ELA to eliminate unused s/w's
- Monthly SCRT review and elimination of anomaly spikes

Outcome

15%+ headroom created for mainframe capacity

~ \$6M savings for 4 years on s/w pricing, which is 25% yearly savings on mainframe TCO

The Cognizant-IBM advantage

Turning modernization into a sustainable capability



Enterprises evaluating mainframe modernization are not looking for tools in isolation or one-time transformation projects, but models that combine deep platform expertise, operational credibility, and a clear path to measurable outcomes. The Cognizant-IBM collaboration brings these elements together, enabling enterprises to:

- 1 Preserve core strengths while enabling change**
The Cognizant-IBM's mainframe modernization delivers unmatched reliability, security, and transaction throughput. Organizations can modernize incrementally—optimizing cost, improving delivery speed, and introducing new capabilities—without putting the core business operations at risk.
- 2 Align modernization to real enterprise constraints**
Modernization efforts often stall because they demand large upfront investments or require disruptive migrations. Consumption-based models such as MFaaS, workload optimization, and orchestrated transformation enable businesses to modernize within existing risk, budget, and regulatory compliances, with no TCO burdens. Costs become more transparent, flexible, and predictable.
- 3 Combine deep platform expertise with operational scale**
IBM provides the core technology and modernization capabilities, while Cognizant delivers managed services, automation, and proven transition governance to keep operations stable as change progresses.
- 4 Drive continuous modernization**
DevOps, automation, and optimization are applied over time, allowing the mainframe to evolve in step with business needs and avoid high-risk, one-time transformation programs.

Conclusion

A clear path forward

The mainframe remains essential—but it must operate with the speed, transparency, and efficiency, up to the standards set by the rest of the modern technology estate. The work ahead for most organizations is straightforward: modernize how those systems operated, integrated, and governed, making mainframes an active participant in the hybrid cloud and the evolving AI-led enterprise systems.

The cognizant-IBM modernization framework provides a grounded, scalable way to achieve that shift. When approached systematically—mainframe modernization becomes a continuous operating discipline, rather than a one-time risk-heavy initiative.

By combining disciplined operations with targeted modernization levers, enterprises can keep the strengths of the mainframe while aligning it with today's delivery, cost, and governance expectations. This is how the core remains relevant, resilient, and ready to support what the business needs next.

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To know more about Cognizant IBM partnership, visit <https://www.cognizant.com/us/en/about-cognizant/partners/ibm>

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Aligning core systems to future-ready hybrid, AI-led operations and modern delivery models



Cognizant (Nasdaq-100: CTSH) engineers modern businesses. We help our clients modernize technology, reimagine processes and transform experiences so they can stay ahead in our fast-changing world. Together, we're improving everyday life. See how at www.cognizant.com or @Cognizant.

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