Not Invented Here Syndrome and Dark Debt: The PagerDuty Story

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pagerduty
Section I
Why are we here?
Not Invented Here Syndrome
“... the tendency towards reinventing the wheel based on the belief that in-house developments are inherently better suited, more secure, more controlled, quicker to develop, and incur lower overall cost than using existing implementations...”

Dark Debt
“....Dark debt was named to draw a parallel with dark matter. Dark matter has detectable effects on the world but cannot be seen or detected directly. Dark debt is found in complex systems and the anomalies it generates are complex system failures. Dark debt is not recognizable at the time of creation. Its impact is not to foil development but to generate anomalies....”

– Woods DD, STELLA: Report from the SNAFU catchers Workshop on Coping With Complexity. 2017
Comparison to technical debt
Build vs Buy: The age old question
Can *building* instead of *buying* lead to dark debt?
Where does *Not Invented Here* syndrome come in the mix?
Section II

WorkQueue
October 24, 2011
WorkQueue
Background
High Availability
Durability
High Scalability
Decent Queryability
Flexible Schema
Backups
Synchronous Replication
What were the options then?
Kafka?
Other options were actually considered
Result: WorkQueue v1
But it did not stop there...
Host based partitioning
Fair partitioning
Time based row bucketing
...there were more services using WorkQueue
In the meanwhile...
Other distributed queues like Kafka gained popularity
PaaS based queues made their presence felt
Cassandra’s API changed*
Thrift RPC fell out of favor within the company
WorkQueue’s nature and widespread use was slowly turning into dark debt.
Delayed Event Processing

Incident Report for PagerDuty

Summary

On October 16, 2016 at 7:24 pm EST, PagerDuty had a service degradation lasting approximately 106 minutes that was related to our alerting pipeline. Customers would have experienced difficulties sending events to PagerDuty’s integration endpoint as well as slightly increased time between events arriving and corresponding incidents being created.

Delayed Notifications

Incident Report for PagerDuty

Postmortem

During a period beginning 20:05 UTC on Tuesday, September 19 and ending at 02:30 UTC Thursday, September 21st PagerDuty experienced an issue that caused delays in delivery of notifications and webhooks.

Issue Processing Events on our Events API

Incident Report for PagerDuty

Postmortem

Summary

On May 3 2017 at 20:01 UTC, PagerDuty suffered a service degradation affecting our Events API; this incident lasted for three hours. Customers would have experienced difficulties sending events to the PagerDuty Events API. We apologize to any customers who were affected by the outage.

What Happened?

At 19:12 UTC, PagerDuty began maintenance on one of the Cassandra-based services responsible for processing events from the Events API.
Section III
Lessons learnt
Dark debt is a product of complexity
The development and use of in-house software for a task is not an indication of dark debt.
However, the proliferation of such special purpose software to other areas is often an indication of Not Invented Here syndrome
Not Invented Here syndrome is an indication of dark debt
Proactive evaluation of past custom solutions before proliferation could help alleviate some of the problems
Unless there is a really strong case for it, don’t go with build*
When in doubt chose simplicity over complexity
Epilogue

The past, the present and the future
Official support for WorkQueue was ended in 2016
Cassandra based WorkQueue’s usage in PagerDuty has significantly reduced since 2017
“Simplicity is a great virtue but it requires hard work to achieve it and education to appreciate it. And to make matters worse: complexity sells better.”

—Edsger W. Dijkstra
Thank You   Merci      धन्यवाद     شكرا لكم
ありがとう   Gracias   谢谢   Danke   Asante

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