ORS Look Out

Perform steps simultaneously

Can any of the tasks of your current processes be performed simulta-neously? One of the ques-tions asked when reengi-neering a process is "How do we complete this process when there is an emergency, and why can't we always complete it like this?" A com-mon answer is that we have several people simultaneously perform the tasks of the process.

Because receiving new insur-ance cards is an emergency to our customers, changes have been made to the retirement application process. ORS-wide, insurance forms are now being processed by one person at the same time the pension is being calculated by another person. This change allows insurance cards to be received weeks earlier than was previously

Can sequential steps be performed simultaneously?

possible. In the past, insurance work was the last step of the application process. Being the last step of the process meant that new insurance cards were not deliv-ered for several weeks after the retirement effective date, often causing worry and frustration for new retirees. Through simul-taneous process-ing, customer worry has been reduced.

Another example of simulta-neous processing can be found at hospitals. In a health care emergency, the medical team can't afford to do things se-quentially or the patient might die. Instead, they perform their duties simultaneously. For example, a paramedic team might have one person gather-ing information about the

Put reengineering ideas into action

At recent SERS team meetings, several reengineering ideas have been developed as a result of follow-up on the information being published in the *LookOut*. Some were implemented right away, and some have required further review or required systems changes.

In the first wave of reengineering ideas, Kathy Schafer changed the way files are pulled for disability applications. Mary Husman changed the way subpoenas and legal requests are processed. Both ideas eliminated a step in the work process, which saves time and effort, and helps im-prove the ability to meet service goals.
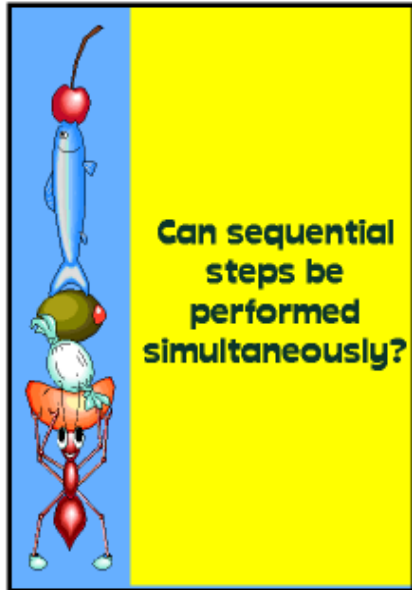
Dave Schupbach suggested a change to the way a retirement application file is handled.

Thought for the Day

The quality of a person's life is in direct proportion to their commitment to excellence, regardless of their chosen field of endeavor.
　　　　—Vincent T. Lombardi

Comings and goings in ORS

Welcome Rick Wilhelmsen to ORS. Rick will be in training in the Lansing office for about 4 weeks, then assume a position in the ORS Waterford regional office. He was previously with the Family Independence Agency.

Greetings to Bryan Cornellier who will deal with human resource, space, policy/procedures and other administrative issues. He was previously employed with EDS and General Motors.

Say "hello" to Tonja Slivensky, an Accountemps employee who will be assistanting Trish Walker-Webb in CIC.

Also, ORS has a "new" employee—Carol Wheaton. She was an Accountemp but is now a "real" State employee. Congratulations, Carol.

Norma Sanchez worked in ORS for 16 months and has transferred to the Department of Corrections.

Smruti Shah joined ORS in May of 1995 and was a member of the SERS Pilot Team when reengineering was launched. Smruti is now an auditor in Consumer and Industry Services.

Charlie Nadeau has been a temp in SERS for the past year. He is going to take care of his new son, Samuel, until law school begins next fall.

Monique Hall, who left ORS December 31, worked on policies and procedures, and was a member of the APV Internet and dial-up calculator team.

December Report from the CIC

During the month of December the Customer Information Center took 7,848 calls, with the average call lasting approximately two minutes and 50 seconds. The first round of Customer Service Satisfaction Surveys were both conducted via phone and given to walk-in customers.

The surveys asked three questions. First, "How would you rate your service on a scale of 1 to 10 with 1 being very poor and 10 being excellent? Most respondents said "10."

The second question asked, "What's one thing we did well?" Responses received included "Everything!", "Friendly," "Did not have to wait" (the caller had been through a personal crisis and our staff was understanding and very nice).

The final question posed by the survey was, "What's one thing we could do better?" Responses ranged from "Nothing," to a suggestion "To follow up one week to make sure customer received the correct information," and even "Have better coffee and provide more interesting and updated reading materials."

Deferred Comp/Defined Contribution Update

Phase two of the legislation that created the 1997 Early Out is now beginning. That's the window between now and April 30th for State employees to choose whether to stay in the defined benefit plan or transfer to the new defined contribution plan.

To make that irrevocable decision, a vested employee must estimate the actuarial present value (APV) of his or her defined benefit plan. ORS has created Internet and telephone dial-up calculators to provide employees with an APV estimate.

However, once an employee makes the irrevocable decision to transfer to the DC plan, an exact calculation must be made by ORS staff so the money can be transferred to the new plan and all adjustments made by December 31, 1998.

Once again we will begin seeing many new faces in ORS. A combination of "loaners" from other departments and temporary employees will form a help desk teamand be performing other work related to the DC plan. Upwards of 50 people will be coming in for training beginning next month, with the help desk up and running to provide service by mid-March.

In the meantime, if you receive calls from members requesting help in any deferred compensation/defined contribution matters please refer callers to their own Human Resources office. All HR offices received informational packets this week.

Should you receive any calls about where to send the registration forms for the DC workshops, refer the caller to Lucy Kish in Treasury at 517-335-5683 or Fax 517-335-5685. She is in charge of coordinating registration.

Perform steps simultaneously

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patient from a friend or family member, while other members of the team simultaneously gather vital statistics and begin performing medical procedures. The end result is better customer service because the patient is more likely to regain health.

New technology makes the concept of performing processes simultaneously even more viable. For instance, imaging technology will make files available on-line so that multiple people can work on the same file at the same time. While we don't have imaging technology yet, the current use of shared drives to give shared access to a document allows several people to work on the same project at the same time.

Many of the services ORS provides, such as pension estimates, confirmation of credit/account balance, and initiating and confirming insurance benefits, are critical to our customers. We can improve customer service by performing some of the tasks related to these processes simultaneously. If, when asking yourself if any of the tasks of your current process can be performed simultaneously, your answer is "YES," then take action to see that those processes are improved.

Tax forms on-line

Tax time's almost here. Save a trip to the post office for forms.You can find any IRS tax form, including those for previous years, on-line at: http://www.irs.ustreas.gov/ Once you enter, click on *forms & pubs* at the bottom of the page.

Y2K: Roadkill on the Information Superhighway?

In just 714 days the Year 2000 will arrive. For many, it will be a time of celebration and parties. But for anyone affected by computers (and that's almost everybody on the planet) midnight on December 31, 1999 will be a time to hold your breath. That's when the countdown to the Year 2000 or Y2K problem (see the next page for an explanation) reaches critical mass and we discover whether our computerized world continues to function.
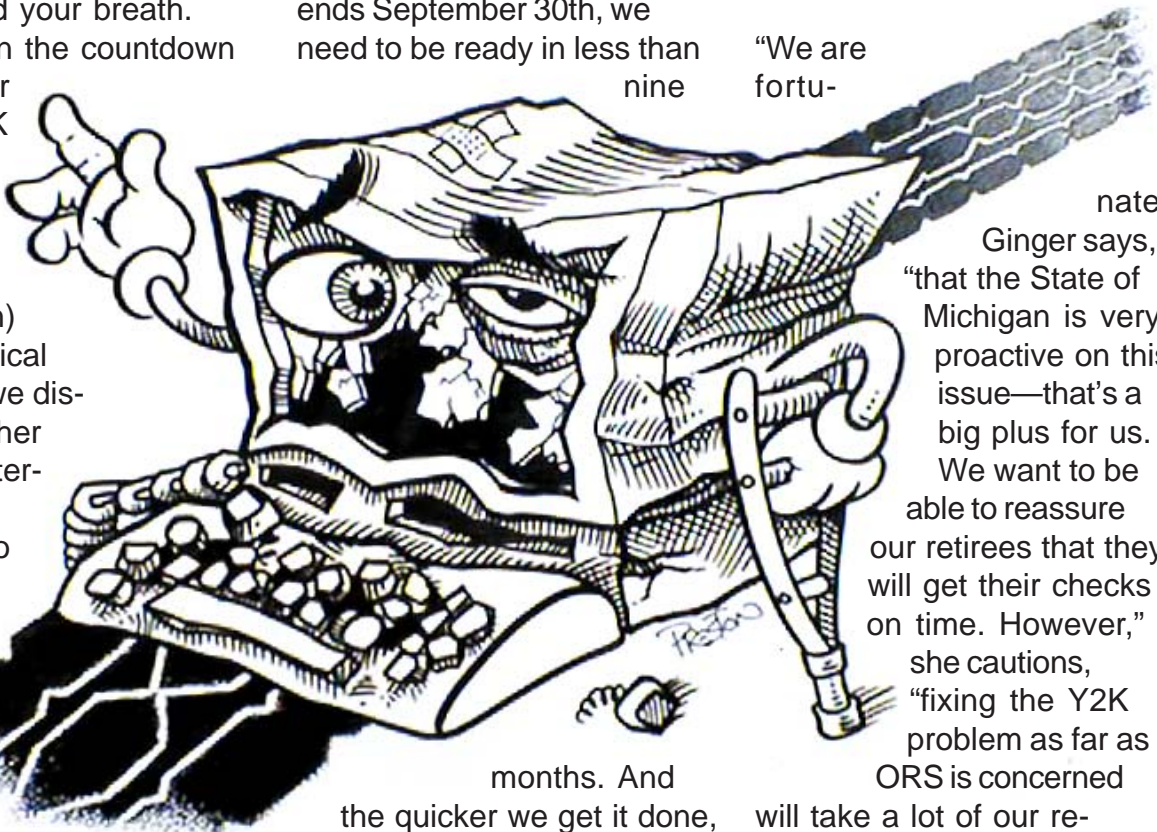
ORS is addressing the Y2K problem. We want to make sure that retirees checks (calculated and printed by computer) continue to arrive in a timely manner. And we want to make sure that when someone reaches retirement age, although most of us would like to turn back the clock on aging, that the computer won't say she is minus 35 years old.

A State mandate decrees that the State of Michigan will be Year 2000-compliant by December 31, 1998. But actually, because the fiscal year ends September 30th, we need to be ready in less than nine months. And the quicker we get it done, the better.

Acting Director of Information Technology and Reengineering Ginger Bomar heads a team from ORS that will work with Automation Services Division (ASD) and a vendor to make sure our data systems are compliant with Year 2000 requirements. Most of our systems require some kind of a change. Most will be expanded to handle a four-digit year so we'll see 1998 instead of 98, and the systems will then be able to recognize 2000 and not be limited to 00.

"We are fortunate," Ginger says, "that the State of Michigan is very proactive on this issue—that's a big plus for us. We want to be able to reassure our retirees that they will get their checks on time. However," she cautions, "fixing the Y2K problem as far as ORS is concerned will take a lot of our resources. This is far bigger than something that can be handled by the IT team alone. IT people don't know all of the systems; so we will be relying on everyone in the organization."

You'll be hearing and seeing a lot more about Y2K over the next several months.

So, what's the big deal about the Y2K problem?

The Y2K problem, as explained by Anthony DeBarros in *USA Today*, is a glitch in computer hardware and software that prevents computers from accurately calculating dates with years beyond 1999 or before 1900. Many systems were designed to store the year in just two digits—with 97 representing 1997, for example. These systems assume that the first two digits of every year are 19.

So trouble arises when the systems have to handle dates outside the 1900s. In the year 2000, for example, a program that tries to figure the age of a person born in 1955 will subtract 55 from 00 and get minus 55.

DeBarros points out that the problem is most acute in mainframe systems, which tend to hold older data and programs. But that doesn't mean PCs are exempt. Any computer system that relies on date calculations must be tested, including any device with a computer chip, from telephones to VCRs to air traffic controller systems to bank accounts and credit cards.

The problem had its roots in the 1960s and 1970s, when a megabyte of system memory could cost tens of thousands of dollars. To save on resources, DeBarros says, early programmers decided to use only two digits to designate the year. Few programmers expected their systems would last into the 1990s. And, largely, they haven't. But as new systems came in, there was a need to make them compatible with the old systems. So the convention of two-digit years perpetuated.

If the problem isn't fixed, when New Year's Day arrives in the year 2000, at best these systems will stop functioning completely and "crash." At worst they will begin to generate bad data, causing potentially catastrophic results.

In fact, we don't have to wait until the year 2000. Already some organizations such as state motor vehicle departments, insurance companies and even high schools and colleges are finding that referencing dates beyond 1999 in their databases triggers bizarre results. Students are shown to have graduated 99 years ago, five-year driver's licenses have already expired and insurance actuary tables search for rates based upon someone being minus 50 years old.

To make matters worse, in some program languages like COBOL, which represents the largest population of mainframe computer software, programmers invented their own code words and phrases to represent date operations or fields. This presents a problem for the specialized tools that have been developed to search the code automatically, identifying and correcting date "function points" as they go. Using artificial intelligence, these systems can speed up the process dramatically, but only when the target pieces of code can be identified up front. Since many programs are undocumented, this can't always be assured, which then requires manual intervention and exhaustive testing. And just to compound the problem, January 1, 2000 falls on a Saturday. Problems caused by coding errors may not be discovered until the next regular working day, allowing enough time for the errors to inflict a great deal of damage.

Former Secretary of Defense Casper Weinberger, speaking on the year 2000 problem in the July 29, 1997 issue of Forbes Magazine, said, "The estimated cost of rectifying this problem worldwide is somewhere between $300 billion and $600 billion."

Testifying before Congress in May of 1996, Year 2000 Expert Peter de Jaeger indicated that December 31, 1998 is actually the critical deadline for completing the programming adjustments. He said, "You should be complete by then, so that you can allocate all of 1999 to test the hundreds of thousands of error prone changes you've introduced into your systems."

And in the August 12, 1996 issue of *Business Week*, Kevin Schick of the Gartner Group, a research firm considered expert in Y2K issues, said, "Firms that spend the necessary money get to stay in business." He thinks as firms run out of time to fix 2000 problems, they will discontinue certain lines of business or even fail.

The ORS reputation continues to grow

The ORS campaign to improve customer service is gaining national attention.

Nationally recognized customer service consultant Barbara Glanz, who trained most ORS staff in customer service techniques last year, highlighted the accomplishments of the SERS early out program and the Customer Information Center in her newsletter, "Spreading Contagious Enthusiasm."

In the Winter 1997 issue, Glanz praised ORS staff for successfully completing the 1997 State employee early retirement program.

"Last fall, I began working with them to prepare for the Early Out retirement," she said. "I did sessions for them on Improving Internal Communications, Building Customer Loyalty and Teambuilding, including ideas to regenerate spirit in the workplace."

The program proved to be successful, Glanz said.

"Partly as a result of these training sessions, they were not only able to meet their goals, but exceeded everyone's expectations. They handled 5,000 retirees in three months when they ordinarily handle 1,200 in 12 months. They met 95% of their goals while they did 16 times the ordinary amount of business, and most of it was done with a smile."

Glanz also noted the CIC's success to date.

"I have worked with (the) hand-picked team of 15 people several times, and they are doing wonderful things," she said.

She detailed the team's ability to exceed the expectations for handling calls from the first day of operations in late October.

"These very special people have proven that when the workplace is one in which the focus is on employees as human beings, and caring, creativity and fun are encouraged, there is no limit to what may be accomplished," she said.

Reengineering in action
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Retirement application files will be organized so staff can quickly find forms and information to make processing pensions faster. Dave's idea required some further work but is now being implemented. Dave also suggested using similar codes for insurances for MPSERS and SERS retirees, and Sara Mills is checking into that possibility.

In another instance SERS has simplified and reduced status codes on the tracking data base to be more reflective of the work being done on each file. This will make it easier to change status and inquire on the system.

Says Information Technology/ Reengineering Division Director Ginger Bomar, "These are examples of using reengineering techniques in the day-to-day work and not waiting for a special project. This is what we need everyone in the office to do if we're to be successful in working smarter."

Your New Year's resolution . . .

. . . was to solve all the Scrambles this year, right? Well, start out the new year with a bang by flexing your cranium on this one. Can you figure out what it says?

ceha yad si a WEN GINGEBNIN . . .
. . . roehtna nhcace ot realn rome, ot eb rome hatn ew hogutth ew ldocu, ot eb EROM nath ew rewe feroeb.

As always, ask your neighbors for clues and discuss it among yourselves after you solve it. The unscrambled version will be posted on first and third floors next week.

ceha yad si a
WEN GINGEBNIN . . . .

. . . roehtna nhcace ot
realn rome,
ot eb rome hatn ew
hogutth ew ldocu,
ot eb EROM nath ew
rewe feroeb.