8 Migration Plan

CHAPTER TOPICS:

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"The first rule of any technology used in a business is that automation applied to an efficient operation will magnify the efficiency. The second is that automation applied to an inefficient operation will magnify the inefficiency."
— Bill Gates

O RGANISATIONS will find the need to make a switch to a new target system at some point during a project. To most people, moving from a legacy system to a replacement system may sound simple, but it is actually quite complex as it involves a high degree of planning and coordination between various parties. Any mistake you make during the migration process can affect users negatively, meaning they lose confidence in the new system and revert back to the legacy system.

Each migration project is unique. The migration effort is in itself a complex engineering task. You risk running into unexpected problems that disrupt the day-to-day business operations and can create havoc to everyone using the system. With users flaring in anger and upset clients at the counters, staff can be tempted to revert to the more stable legacy system. Planning for a migration process is therefore very important as failure to migrate successfully could mean failure of implementing the new system which would result in a failed project. Hence, a carefully prepared and well-rehearsed plan is needed to ensure the migration takes place smoothly and easily.

What is Migration?

The process of moving from one system to another is known as migration. A migration may involve transferring data or programs from one system to another, or physically replacing an old hardware device with a new one. Normally, organisations may decide to perform a migration when the existing hardware or software system has become outdated, or its capacity is insufficient to cope with the demands of more computing resources or more advance technology features. In projects that involve the installation of a new application, a migration is required to move data from the old database to the new database, or programs from old system to new system.

Migration may take place in any one or more of the following situations:

- Moving from a manual-based operation to an ICT-based operation

- Replacing an existing application with a new or upgraded application with new functionalities and new features

- Replacing the current software with new or upgraded software

- Upgrading or replacing existing infrastructure such as servers, networks, workstations and printers

- Replacing the entire legacy system with a more advanced technology, involving the replacements of all existing hardware, software and workstations

- Migrating data from a legacy system to a new system

How to Manage Migration?

A migration could be a project on its own or a sub-project within a bigger project, because of the complex coordination efforts needed in initiating, planning and executing the activities involved within a specific time and budget. If not planned carefully, the migration process may pose problems to both the project team and stakeholders, as it introduces risks of system downtime, data loss, or operational disruptions, during which the system cannot be accessed and business comes to a halt!

Incidents of system downtime can result in serious implications to the business side of the organisation. For example, disruption to an online securities trading system may cause major losses to users and clients who use the online services for selling and buying shares. Obviously, in such environments failing to have a good migration plan spells disaster.

A migration may also require data or programs to be moved from one system to another, introducing the risk of data loss, data corruption or loss of integrity. As the volume of data increases, the more chances there are of something going wrong in the process. Therefore, careful planning is important to avoid serious disruption to the business, especially to users and their clients whose daily operations are heavily dependent on the system. A well-managed migration should aim at making the transition as smooth as possible without any disruption.

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