

APPLICATION DECOMMISSIONING

ACHIEVING APPLICATION DECOMMISSIONING By James Newland

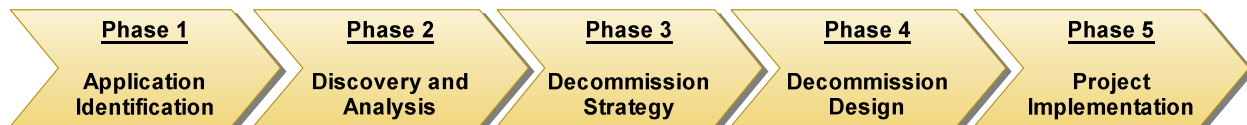
By a wide margin, the most common justification for application decommissioning is cost savings. Many ERP systems are installed with the expressed purpose of consolidating functionality and shutting down old, expensive applications.

Unfortunately many decommissioning projects fail and some are never even started because they are so complex. It is not as easy as just flipping a switch; it is verifying report accuracy, data cleansing, enhancing functionality in other applications, data retention strategies, adhering to legal requirements, personnel retraining, and a host of other issues. Severing the tie to an old application can be a painful process if not approached correctly.

How can you go about making sure the project is a success? Careful planning, the right methodology and due diligence are keys. Go/No-Go decisions need to be made at the end of project phases to ensure you will achieve the desired ROI and that the project will be successful. The major decommissioning project phases are:

- Application Identification
- Discovery and Analysis
- Decommissioning Strategy
- Decommissioning Design
- Project Implementation

Without these steps, the quality of your implementation team will not matter – you will fail to cost-effectively achieve your objectives and you may fail outright.



This paper will briefly explore each of these phases, discuss the appropriate go/no-go decisions, and give you tips to help make your decommissioning project successful. Should you need more information on any of these items please give us a call, we are happy to help.

Thanks,
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Phase 1 – Application Identification

The first phase of a properly-structured application decommissioning project is also the easiest. In this phase, identify the applications that are good candidates for decommissioning and document what makes them so. Generally your organization already has a good notion of the existing candidate applications and their impact on your organization.

Simply naming the applications is not enough. Consider the business function, current and future support costs, and usage when building your list. Take the time to answer a few initial questions about the application before you go forward with your list. What is the approximate budget? How many users does the application have? What business processes and analytics does the application support? Can another application (or a group of applications) assume all of the functionality for the application? What needs to happen with the data from the application (conversion, archiving, or destruction)?

Create a template of questions for each application. The questions and answers should not exceed one page when complete. This template will force you to concentrate on primary concerns. In later phases there will be plenty of time to explore the full impact of decommissioning the applications.

Once you have constructed a list of candidates and answered some questions about those candidates you reach an important go/no-go decision: have we identified the right applications? Do any applications appear to have high cost relative to their functionality or a low number of users? Do any applications duplicate functionality found in newer applications?

While unlikely, you may uncover information that completely prevents you from going forward at this time. A more common scenario is that you have identified application and/or corporate issues that affect the ability to easily decommission a once-promising candidate.

If you have at least one promising candidate, you can feel comfortable about proceeding to Phase 2. If not, can you identify any other candidates? If you are unable to identify any new candidates, decommissioning may not be right for your organization at this time.

Phase 2 – Discovery and Analysis

The first phase of your decommissioning project should give you confidence that you are looking at the right applications. The second phase explores these applications in detail and provides a much better picture of the work required, the potential costs savings, and the disruption the decommissioning might cause.

This Discovery Phase captures many additional hard and soft facts:

- What functionality must be re-created in other applications?
- What are the data structures in the application?
- What are the interfaces into and out of the applications?
- What are the reports and analytics generated by the applications?
- What is the maintenance budget for the application?
- How many users are actively using the application? How many users occasionally use the application?
- Will users need to be re-trained, reassigned, or let go when the applications are decommissioned?
- What are the legal requirements for the information and functionality of the application?
- Are there any organizational obstacles that prevent you from decommissioning the application?

All of these questions need to be answered in detail. The answers to these and other questions will provide all of the information you need for the next go/no-go decision – do the candidate applications still make sense for decommissioning? As in Phase 1, it is possible that some or all of the applications you identified no longer look like good candidates. In this case you will need to return to Phase 1 and identify new candidates. In this case – fear not! Your effort has not been wasted; you now have excellent technical and functional descriptions of your candidate applications.

If you decide to go forward, which applications look like the best candidates? These applications become the decommissioning targets for Phase 3, Strategy.

Phase 3 – Decommissioning Strategy

Knowing which applications should be decommissioned is only part of the overall strategy. In what order should they be decommissioned? How, specifically, will you deal with the information contained in each application? There may be strict legal requirements for that data. How will you deal with displaced personnel? How, specifically, will other applications be changed to accommodate the functionality of the decommissioned applications?

The focus of the Decommission Strategy Phase should be, “How do we maximize ROI and minimize disruption?” Answering this question is critical to achieving an effective decommissioning project design. The big picture design of how things need to fit together and in what order provides solid footing for Phase 4 – Decommission Design. Without this strategy you risk missing important pieces by diving straight to the details. The consequences can be lost time, money, and needless organizational disruption.

What additional details belong in your strategy? From the technical perspective, be sure to understand all inputs and outputs for each application. Understand metadata for all

reports and analytics generated by the applications and how they will be accommodated in your to-be application architecture. Draw diagrams for clarity and obtain sign-off from affected parties to ensure you have not missed anything.

From the business perspective, make sure all affected parties will have their functions accounted for in the to-be architecture or if not, that they understand when they will lose their functionality. This is also a good time to ease any fears for displaced workers. Have a plan for how they will fit into the new environment – they will ask for it, so make sure you have a good answer or they will assume that you have not thought about them. You will likely have enough organization obstacles as it is so there is no reason to create new ones.

Finally, at the end of the strategy phase you should be able to produce a rough Cost/Benefit analysis for your strategy. When performing this analysis be sure to ask, 'Will relaxing any requirements lead to better results?' Some low priority requirements may be placing limitations on your anticipated ROI.

The Go/No-Go in this phase gets to the heart of decommissioning – does the strategy maximize ROI and minimize disruption? Is the expected result worth the work?

Phase 4 – Decommissioning Design

Once you have developed a strategy that will maximize ROI and minimize disruption, it's time to get down to details. A good detailed design will save a tremendous amount of work on the implementation and lead to a better result. A proper, complete design is worth the effort.

What is required from the Design Phase? From the technical side you are looking for detailed instructions on how to accomplish the decommissioning tasks. A good design can be handed over to developers and used for development. Details include a complete description of the data that needs to be converted and precisely how it needs to be converted. Be sure to capture business definitions for fields to ensure you completely understand the data and its usage.

The technical specifications you create in this phase are important documents not just for development. These documents will create a detailed record of the old architecture, the new architecture and how you got from one to the other. This documentation is very important for compliance initiatives and should be as complete as possible.

On the business side the design should include a requirements traceability document that ensures every business requirement is accounted for in the technical design. If you are unable to produce this type of document you may miss very important requirements. You should also use your business requirements to make an initial list of required tests for the implementation. As a rule, every requirement should generate at least one test.

In addition, this phase should include a detailed plan for personnel re-training, re-assignment, or reductions. You will need to carry out these plans during the Implementation Phase.

Finally cost/benefit analysis produced in Phase 3 can be refined. This better estimate will allow you to re-examine your Go/No-Go decision from Phase 3 and give you confidence in your project.

Phase 5 – Project Implementation

Project implementation should follow a comprehensive design effort. This is not to say that the entire design effort must be finished before implementation as some pieces can (and should) happen in parallel if possible.

The main criterion for starting implementation is, 'do I have all of the plans necessary for this piece of the decommissioning effort?' You may be decommissioning several applications, some of them unrelated. If you identify applications that can be started before others, get started.

Remember that you should document as you implement. Document the code used to convert data. Capture logs validating that the expected results were achieved. Perform comprehensive functionality testing and get sign-off on the results. Basically anything you *can* document you *should* document. Once the procedure is over you should be able to answer any questions about how you achieved the results. You may be required by law to do so depending on the application functions and the data they contain.

If training is necessary for the decommissioning, make sure you put forth effort to get the training completed before applications are cut off. The simple mistake of waiting too long to do so may mean days or even weeks of limited functionality not because the applications are not ready but because the users are not ready.

Your implementation is not complete until proven and validated by rigorous testing with a complete documentation trail. The application to be decommissioned should be certified 'decommission-ready' which ensures:

1. All data feeds in and out of the application have ceased.
2. Business functionality has been replaced or eliminated.
3. Data has been converted, archived in an application-neutral format, or destroyed.
4. Data required for continuing analysis is available to users.
5. Audit trails exist to ensure any data transformations can be identified so as to recreate the original data values.

Finally, hope for the best, but plan for problems when you decommission an application. Despite your best efforts not everyone in your organization will, 'get the memo' or do their part in making the effort a success. Some will claim they were not adequately involved. Some may even sign off on a design or even testing and then complain about it later! For these situations the only remedy is to have technical and functional support available to help ease the transition.

Conclusion

Application decommissioning can be challenging without a clear plan and approach. Following a well-designed methodology, using the proper tools, documenting results, and making go/no-go decisions at critical junctions can ensure your success. Throughout the process, use these guidelines to get the most out of your decommissioning project.

Application Decommissioning: Do's and Don'ts:

DO – Involve stakeholders in decision-making whenever possible. Disaffected stakeholders will become obstacles.

DON'T – Let organizational obstacles make decisions for you. Where possible find a way around them. Tread lightly where you can but kick down doors if you must.

DO – Validate data and results prior to destroying data or turning off applications. You may be legally required to do so.

DON'T – Assume other teams are ok with your plans and results. When another team is affected, get sign-off in planning, development, and testing where possible.

DO – Document as much as possible as you perform tasks. It is easier, more accurate, and less time-consuming to document as you go. Once the process is over it is tough to go back and do a better job of documenting.

DON'T – Let the scope of a task dissuade you from going forward. One large application may return as much on investment as several smaller applications and vice versa.

DO – Go forward boldly. Decommissioning is often the elephant in the room no one talks about. Take charge of the situation and start saving money!

About Datric, Inc.

Datric, founded in 2000, is headquartered in Charlotte, NC, USA. Datric is a premier provider of data integration and collaboration solutions, specializing in SAP and data warehousing. Datric consultants have experience both architecting and implementing data integration applications for many Fortune 100 companies.

We combine a simple, time-honored approach to business with leading-edge technology to help you achieve your goals. Our data management software, Agile Data Suite, provides cost-effective project acceleration for data conversion, decommissioning, and data warehousing across complex enterprise architectures.

For more information about our products and services please visit us at www.datric.com or call 704-504-2464.