Proceed
A Guide to Achieving Legacy Application Decommissioning
How can you ensure your project is a success?

Careful planning, the right methodology and due diligence are key.

Go/no-go decisions need to be made at the end of each project phase to ensure you achieve the desired ROI and project success.

Key decommissioning project phases:

> Application identification
> Discovery and analysis
> Decommissioning strategy
> Decommissioning design
> Project implementation

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

The following pages briefly outline each phase, highlighting appropriate go/no-go decisions and sharing tips to make your decommissioning project a success.

Please contact us for more information on decommissioning.
Phase 1 – Application identification

The first phase of a properly structured decommissioning project is also the easiest. In this phase, identify applications that are good candidates for decommissioning and document what makes them so. Usually your organisation will already have a good notion of the candidate applications and their impact on your business.

Simply naming the applications is not enough. Consider their business function, current and future support costs and usage. Take 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 the required functionality?
> What happens to 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. 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.

Once you have constructed a list of candidates and answered some questions about them, you reach an important go/no-go decision:

> Have we identified the right applications?
> Do any applications have high cost relative to their functionality or a low number of users?
> Do any applications duplicate functionality found in newer applications?

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

If you have at least one promising candidate, you can feel comfortable to proceed 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 at this time.
Phase 2 – Discovery and analysis

Phase 1 should give you confidence that you are looking at the right applications. This phase explores these applications in detail and provides a better picture of the work required, the potential costs savings and the disruption that decommissioning may cause.

**Phase 2 captures additional hard and soft facts:**

- What functionality must be recreated 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 retrained, reassigned or let go after decommissioning?
- What are the legal requirements for the information and functionality of the application?
- Are there organisational 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. If no candidates are suitable you will need to return to Phase 1 and identify new applications. 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 are the best candidates? These will become the decommissioning targets for Phase 3.
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 will you deal with the information contained in each application - are there legal requirements to comply with?
> How will other applications be changed to accommodate the functionality of the decommissioned applications?

The focus of the third phase should be: ‘How do we maximise ROI and minimise 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 a solid footing for Phase 4. Without this strategy you risk missing important pieces by diving straight into the detail – resulting in lost time, money, and needless disruption.

What additional details belong in your strategy?

> A technical understanding of all inputs and outputs for each application
> Knowledge of the metadata for all reports and analytics generated by each application and how this will be accommodated in your to-be application architecture
> Diagrams to provide clarity

Once your strategy is complete obtain sign-off from affected parties to ensure you have not missed anything.

From the business perspective, make sure all affected parties have their functions accounted for in the to-be architecture or if not, ensure they understand when they will lose their functionality.

Finally, at the end of this strategy phase you should be able to produce a rough cost/benefit analysis. When performing this analysis be sure to ask: ‘Will relaxing any requirements lead to better results?’ as 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 maximise ROI and minimise disruption? Is the expected result worth the work?
Phase 4 – Decommissioning design

Once you have developed a strategy that will maximise ROI and minimise disruption, it’s time to get down to detail.

A good detailed design saves a tremendous amount of work on the implementation and leads to a better result – it is worth the effort at this stage.

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 this should be done. 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 not just important 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 is very important for compliance initiatives and should be as complete as possible.

The design should also include a requirements traceability document that ensures every business requirement is accounted for in the technical design. Without this document you may miss very important requirements. You should also use your business requirements to make an initial list of required tests for implementation. As a rule, every requirement should generate at least one test.

This phase should also include a detailed plan for personnel retraining, reassignment or reductions. You will need to carry out these plans during the implementation phase.

Finally, the 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 criteria 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, then start.

Remember to 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 contained.

If training is necessary for decommissioning, make sure that it is complete before applications are cut off. The simple mistake of waiting too long for training may mean days or weeks of limited functionality because users are not ready.

Implementation is not complete until proven and validated by rigorous testing with a complete documentation trail. Each decommissioned application should be certified ‘decommission-ready’ which confirms:

- All data feeds in and out of the application have ceased
- Business functionality has been replaced or eliminated
- Data has been converted, archived in an application-neutral format or destroyed
- Data required for continuing analysis is available to users
- Audit trails exist to ensure 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 organisation 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 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 ensure success. Throughout the process, using these guidelines will help you 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 organisational 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 document effectively.

**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!
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