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view**point**

Data Migration – from head in The Cloud to feet on the ground.

40% of systems implementations are late, over budget or fail completely because of challenges migrating the business data.

Why do so many Data Migrations fail?

So let's say that you run an enterprise that has complex business processes with some manual handoffs, and you're moving from legacy to a brave new world, with new IT systems, most probably in the cloud. And now you're beginning to think about the challenges of data migration. Straight off the bat, this is unlikely to be a 'lift and shift' job. But can it really be that hard? Surely if you've bought a bucket-load of your favourite SI's version of ETL (Extract Transform and Load), everything will be ok? Well – maybe not.

First off - start early

Really? How early is early? Well, if you've done your requirements analysis for the new system and you haven't also started to look at the data migration challenge, then you're probably behind the curve. Can that be right? Sadly, yes it can. Just imagine that you do start early and find that actually, it's as easy as pie. You then nail the detailed plan and you're now in the glorious (if unlikely) situation that you know data migration is not on the critical path for launch. You may even have gained key insights which will positively influence the design of the IT systems themselves. Happy days. That has cost you nothing extra.

Now imagine you start later and the work reveals some real ball breaking issues. At best, you're now looking at sleepless nights worrying while you get it sorted. Worse still, you might be looking at delaying a committed launch by weeks, months or even longer.

But what can possibly cause that to happen?

It's more than just field mapping

Most likely you will find that you have one or more of the following challenges:

- Lack of data integrity in source data, leading to poor source data quality. You are likely to have to address at least some data quality issues. But what will data that is 'good enough' for migration look like? What data absolutely has to be sufficiently cleansed before migration and what might be better cleansed post migration or simply left 'as is'? Some data that's needed for the new systems may even be in Excel and other external files. So how will you manage and measure this in a meaningful way as you progress towards a migration?

- Complex 'Source to Target' system mapping and transformation. Simple structures like contact names and addresses may map easily and be transformed using automated scripts. But when you move into more complex data structures, which might also be integrated across functions such as CRM, Service Management and Finance systems, life can suddenly become a lot more difficult as you try to account for the flow of data. So what will the integrated data load map look like?

- Data reconciliation and migration at a single moment in time. A single migration event may be the best approach and may even be simpler than a phased migration for many reasons. So you'll need to ensure that the data at the point of cutover is fully reconciled and any exceptions are accounted for, such as changes that are 'in flight' at the moment the data is frozen. Also, you'll need to ensure that there are 'no surprises' when it comes the migration itself. How will you ensure you have a tried and tested migration process and that data dropouts are at a manageable level?

So it's not just about field mapping. But that's why you employ bright people in IT and maybe even an SI or two. They'll get it all sorted – right? Wrong!

IT folk alone can't fix it

It doesn't matter what your SI or IT folk say. This is going to involve and consume the time and energy of the only people who understand what the data actually means to your business and how it's really used. And that means it will consume the time and energy of the people in your business and not just those in IT. After all, they are the only ones who really, really, understand what data is important and why.

If you've been unlucky, then you've bought the line which said 'give us your data and we'll load it into the new systems for you,' only to be told subsequently (surprise, surprise) that there are 'issues' with 'your' data. And now somehow, it's become your problem. Ouch. That hurts. And trust us – it happens. No one, and especially SI's, like to take on hard-to-quantify-risks. And so they tend to make the hard but important bits "Someone Else's Problem."

How to get smart…

First, follow a proven best practice methodology with strong business engagement – breaking the migration project into different elements and using an agile 'incremental and iterative' approach. This will help to reveal problems early on, build confidence as the project progresses, and ensure there are no nasty surprises at the end.

Second, search out people to work on the project who have done this before. Data Migration expertise is different from Data Management, Data Warehousing and a hundred other data specialisms, and it takes more than simply knowing a bit of SQL. You'll be able to recognise the good people as soon as you meet them. They might be a bit older and greyer than you expect, but that's because they carry the lessons of previous migrations with them. They'll also be the ones who aren't promising you 'go live' dates before they've even begun to understand your specific migration journey and how to get 'from here to there'.

Third, do not, ever, talk to people about data migration at a social function.

Quortex are Change Management experts that also specialise in complex data migration. We employ best practice with tried and tested methodologies.

If you are about to embark in a data migration or perhaps you are already under way, feel free to get in touch - even if it's just for some therapy!