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WHITE PAPER

Seven Guiding Principles of Data Center Migration Success



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Due to their transformative nature, a data center migration project can easily become a cure-all project for a long list of operational challenges, exposing the migration project to risk and even failure.

Here are seven guiding principles that will greatly enhance the success of your data center migration. The overarching theme? Stay the course, focused on achieving the data center migration objectives.



Principle One: Perfection Kills Migration Progress.

All too often organizations attempt to achieve IT perfection rather than solving 90% of the problems driving their migration.

Seeking perfection prevents fast starts and early wins. Take for example the following common scenario. An organization has outgrown their data center's capacity requirements and needs to move. At the time of the migration, most servers were virtualized with the exception of a handful of legacy applications sitting on antiquated platforms. Making the ill-advised decision to re-platform those applications and virtualize them during the migration will introduce delays and could double the cost and duration of the project.

The surest path forward is to avoid getting stuck debating all the possibilities and all the exceptions to the rule instead of moving forward with the project. Allow progress to be made on the 90% while the remaining 10% works itself out via parallel work streams or is tabled for reconsideration post migration.



Principle Two: Trust but Verify.

Most organizations have an integrated team approach leveraging specialist companies and OEMs. In a complex IT delivery landscape, it is important to trust the team but to also verify deliverables. This is especially critical to data center migrations. Here's a real life example:

After conducting a thorough design review for one of our clients, we identified a major design flaw in a network architecture delivered by an external 3rd party vendor. They discovered that the vendor did not use current architectural best practices nor did they use the reference architecture and release notes specific to the target infrastructure. If the design had not been reviewed, it would have had a significant impact to mission critical systems causing operational disruptions that could have resulted in loss of revenue as well as reputation.

Leveraging expert advice is smart, but never trust a single source blindly. A review of high-level and low-level designs up front can save millions in future corrective actions.



Principle Three: Migrating the Problem Doesn't Solve the Problem.

Operational dysfunction is not cured by a migration. More often than not, the migration project compounds the challenges.

Operational dysfunction is only cured through an evolutionary and transformative approach. Performing a root cause analysis will expose the pain points and assist you in prioritizing which issues are addressed before and/or after the migration.

A data center migration is certainly an opportune time to transform and optimize your enterprise environment. While seemingly contradictory to principle one, some operational dysfunctions need to be addressed as part of the migration project and/or shortly thereafter.

Here are some examples of problems, if not addressed before migration, will carry into the new environment and significantly compromise the benefits of the data center migration.

1. Lack of service level agreements (SLAs)
2. Missing service level objectives (SLOs)
3. Slow provisioning

Problems not understood, not resolved, or deferred like the examples above are only passed on and magnified in the new environment.



Principle Four: Manage Change, or it will Manage You.

Governance is an important component of any project but especially so in a data center migration as it involves a broad swath of an organization's operating environment. Strong change control is *not optional*. Change control takes on two common forms:

Form 1: Change Control. It involves changes to the configuration of infrastructure and/or deployment of infrastructure to a specific environment, i.e., production, development, test, QA.

Form 2: Change Order. It involves changes to the scope of the project.

These two distinct forms of governance processes must be in place to prevent over billing. How important are these governance processes above? We have seen vendors charging 40-100% more than the originally planned estimate. Typical over-billing triggers are:

- Changing requirements in project scope and objectives
- Changing necessary infrastructure configuration for a successful data center migration

In many cases, organizations feel trapped with little choice but to proceed with their vendor's over-billing because it's just too cumbersome and time consuming to shift vendors midstream. Closely managing change control by requiring rigorous reporting will save you money and time.



Principle Five: Avoid Disappointment by Default.

If you don't know what you're asking for, a vendor will inevitably deliver something you're not expecting. This is what we call "disappointment by default."

Key to your data center migration success is negotiating the terms up front covering just one phase of the project at a time.

Trade news and blogs are riddled with stories of major organizations failing to deliver on IT projects. Migration projects, in particular, are complex and becoming more so with the emergence of distributed digital infrastructures.

Migration projects that fail to deliver are often the result of poorly defined project scope and deliverables — your instruction to the vendor. Therefore, your instructions must be clear, complete, specific, measurable, and precise:

- Scope must be defined in detail.
- Deliverables must be specific and unambiguous.

This is hard work and remarkably glossed over prior to inking the contract. Key to your data center migration success is negotiating the terms up front covering *just one phase of the project at a time*. This way, future work is contingent upon your vendor's immediate success, and your leverage as a buyer is retained.



Principle Six: The Golden Rule for Risk Management.

The golden rule for risk management is to move from “as-is” to “as-is.”

Managing Risk is essential to a successful data center migration project. An effective means of managing risk is to minimize changes to your environment during the actual migration (touched on in Principles One and Three above). The golden rule for risk management is to move from “as-is” to “as-is.” In other words, manage changes to your environment before or after migration, but not during.

Environmental changes introduced into the project increase the risk factor by an order of magnitude. By avoiding changes such as IPs and hostnames organizations can save countless hours and reduce the overall risk of operational disruptions.



The ideal scenario is to manage the necessary environmental changes *before* an organization begins a migration project. If an organization chooses to introduce change to their environment post migration, we recommend a settling period in the new facility. This approach allows time to resolve any dangling details remaining from the migration and to manage subsequent environmental changes in a controlled and manageable manner.

Principle Seven: Don't wish your way to Failure.

There are an infinite number of improvements that can be made to an environment from infrastructure, to apps, to operations. The wish list may contain a lot of things that have been deferred over a period of time. It never seems to shrink. Do not let the wish list slip into the overall scope of your data center migration.

Leadership must define clear objectives and limits for the project. It's about focus. If the goal is to lower cost, focus on things like density and rightsizing infrastructure with cost-effective storage tiers. If the goal is new capabilities, focus on what enables those capabilities.

Organizations who allow requirements to evolve, commonly known as scope creep, unwittingly create projects that become unmanageable where everything fails because nothing is being completed. Staff members begin to work on competing priorities and are unable to achieve the stated objectives.

In the end, it comes down to priorities, not a wish list. Don't wish your way to failure; focus on migration success.

Summary

A data center migration project can transform an organization's entire operating environment. And conversely, due to its transformative nature, it is easy to drift off course trying to fix *all* operational challenges, unwittingly exposing the project to risk and even failure.

These seven guiding principles can help keep your organization on course to fully realize the significant and lasting benefits of a data center migration.

About David-Kenneth Group

David-Kenneth Group's singular focus is data center transformations. Our services include strategic planning for hybrid and cloud, IT discovery, data center and cloud migrations, and disaster recovery/service continuity. All of our people, processes, tools, and technology are purposed to help organizations transform their operating environments to achieve significant business gains while minimizing the pain. Our vendor independent posture enables us to focus on meeting our clients' objectives and positioning them for success, resulting in a rightsized operating environment designed to deliver consistent business results.

Our Data Center Migration Methodology is recognized by leading industry analyst as a proven process for planning and executing a data center migration project. Please visit www.DavidKennethGroup.com for additional resources on data center migrations.