

Priasoft Solutions

Co-existence vs. One-time Migrations

Background

There is often a desire to design a migration process that is 'slow and methodical'. Co-existence is one of the first ideas that seem to support this. The idea is to only migrate a few users at any given time so as to not have (it is believed) a large amount of issues the day after the migration. This idea is generally garnered from a place of fear – fear that the migration will be problematic and will have many issues. Ultimately the fear is one of perception, a fear that the end users will perceive the migration is flawed, is causing the problems, and that the new environment is actually worse than the current one.

This white paper serves to shed new light on the co-existence paradigm. The ideas presented here come from over a decade of experience and from feedback from customers.

Flawed Ideas

There are several flaws in the co-existence paradigm.

Safety

Co-existence often is presented as a safety net. This comes from the idea that the source environment will still be alive and working and if things go bad that you can somehow move backwards. It also comes from an idea that it's easier to handle only a few issues at a time instead of a huge amount of issues all at once. Although the statement on it's own has merit, it is not very realistic. Just because you have 1 out of 10 mailboxes with issue in a batch of 20 does not mean that you'll actually have a 10% issue rate. In fact, it's a complete assumption based on a very small sample set.

Control

Co-existence appears, at the onset, to provide better control over the project and the perception to end-users. The opposite is more often true – co-existence provides less control. The loss of control is due to the fact that there are features that end-users expect to work but do not because Microsoft Exchange does not have the ability. For instance, opening the calendar of a peer is only possible if both mailboxes are in the same Exchange environment. Furthermore, control over the schedule is often lost because those departments (or business units, or whatever groupings may exist) that have not migrated yet will begin to want to delay their migration because of negative feedback from the group(s) that have already migrated.

PHONE

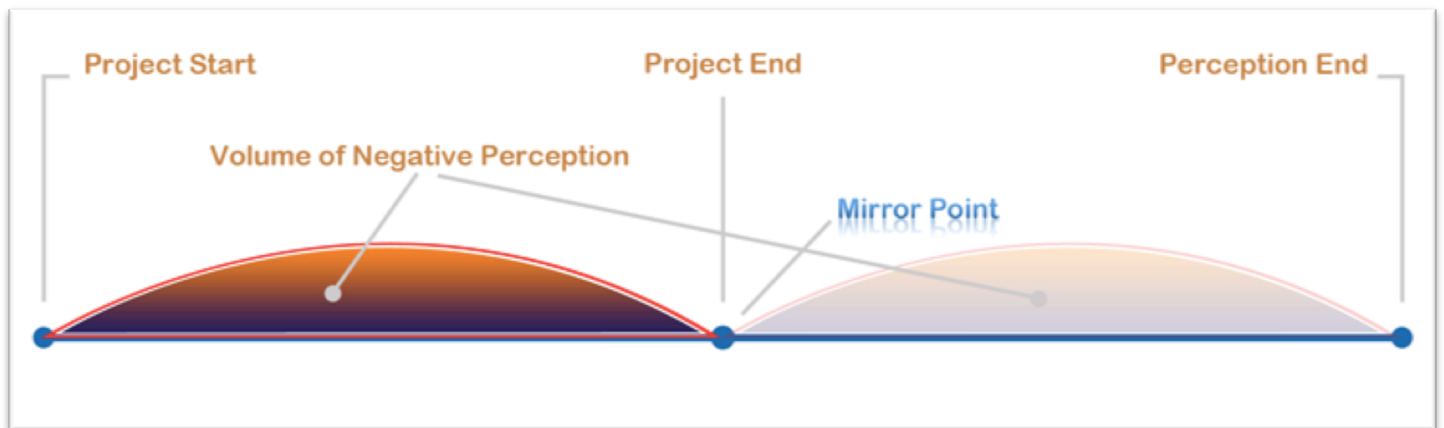
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Time

Co-existence, by nature of the style, is setup to create a long project timeline. Most project managers will agree that the longer a project runs, the more dissatisfaction is gained over time. Short projects have the best success. Consider the following diagram in relation to time:



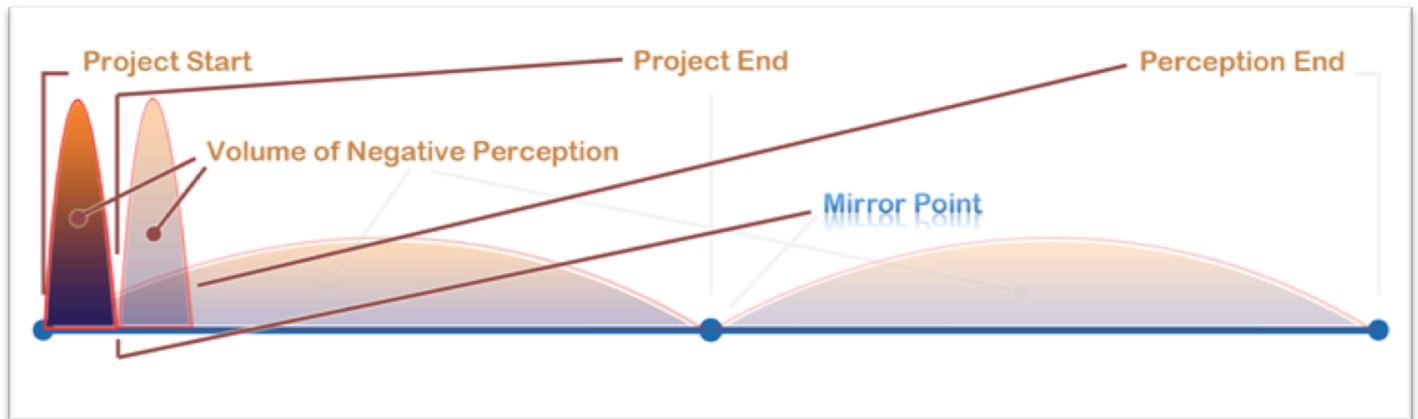
In the above diagram, we see that from project start to project end the negative perception slowly rises from the start of the project and peaks at the middle. The reason for this is that migrated users are separated from non-migrated users. There are many exchange features that are not available between 2 exchange organizations. It's this lack of feature that is the start of the negative perception. Once past the middle of the project timeline, more users are in the new environment than not, and as such the issues start to taper off.

However, we have what is called the 'mirror point'. In most cases, there is a period of time after a project ends in which the users will still talk about the project and the issues they experienced. This period usually mirrors the length and volume of the project itself. It's not until the 'Perception End' that users start to really forget the project.

In a co-existence migration, although the amplitude of the perception is not very high, the total volume is quite large. The volume is seen in the above diagram as the Blue to Orange shaded area under the arc.

Lastly, even though you make it past the 'Perception End' point on the timeline, end users are rarely so forgiving. In several years when another migration is scheduled (for whatever the reason), users will quickly remember the pain of the last one and will voice opinions right away such that it makes it that much more difficult to start this future project.

One-time Migration Paradigm



Consider the revised diagram above. This depicts the difference that choosing a one-time migration affords you. Although the amplitude of the perception is higher (meaning that users are more vocal and that help desk calls are probably higher than usual), the total volume of negative perception is greatly reduced overall.

Also consider that a migration is probably not the first time that such a spike in perception has been seen – likely if you have ever had a server outage you have seen a similar spike in feedback. The point to consider here is that the business survived such an event with the current resources (server outages are often unplanned). Your business can do better than just ‘survive’ a one-time migration because this will be a planned and thoroughly tested event – one that you can choose to staff up for and provide specific pre-event guidance, unlike an unplanned outage.

Additionally, because the mirror point was moved, the perception end comes that much sooner and the pain and frustration caused by the transition is soon forgotten.