

Data readiness for SAP S/4HANA

Why data is the single biggest determinant of
project success





Introduction

When organisations plan an SAP transformation, attention often focuses on technology, processes, timelines, and budgets. Data is frequently viewed as a workstream that can be addressed later in the programme.

In reality, data readiness is one of the most important factors influencing SAP project success. From reporting and compliance to customer service, inventory management, procurement, finance, and operational decision-making, every aspect of an SAP solution relies on the quality of the information flowing through it.

A modern ERP platform can streamline processes and provide powerful insights, but if inaccurate, incomplete, or inconsistent data enters the system, the value of the investment can quickly be undermined. Many SAP programmes encounter delays not because the technology is unfit for purpose, but because data issues surface too late in the delivery lifecycle.

This guide explores why data readiness matters, the common challenges organisations face, and the steps leaders can take to improve the quality, governance, and preparedness of their data before migration begins.

Why data readiness matters

Every SAP transformation relies on data. Customer records, supplier information, product data, material masters, financial information, inventory records, and transactional history all play a critical role in business operations.

When data is unreliable, the impact extends beyond the project itself.

Organisations may encounter:

Reporting inaccuracies

Operational inefficiencies

Compliance concerns

Delayed decision-making

Poor user confidence

Reduced adoption

Increased support requirements

Data readiness is not simply about moving information from one system to another. It is about ensuring the organisation can trust the information within its new SAP environment from day one.

The hidden risks of poor data

Many organisations underestimate the scale of the data challenge until the programme is well underway. Legacy systems often contain years of duplicated records, inconsistent standards, manual workarounds, and outdated information. These issues may have been manageable within older environments, but SAP transformations often expose them.

Common consequences include:

Failed migration cycles

Delayed testing activities

Reporting discrepancies

Process interruptions

Increased project costs

Extended go-live timelines

The further a programme progresses before addressing data issues, the more difficult and expensive those issues become to resolve.

Data is more than a technical issue

One of the biggest misconceptions around SAP transformation is that data migration is solely an IT responsibility. In reality, data is a business asset. Business teams create it, maintain it, use it, and depend upon it.

Successful programmes recognise that data readiness requires collaboration between:

Business stakeholders

Data owners

Process owners

IT teams

SAP implementation partners

Programme leadership

Data quality cannot be fixed by technology alone. It requires ownership, accountability, and ongoing governance across the organisation.

The five pillars of SAP data readiness

1. Understand your current data landscape

Before planning a migration, organisations need a clear view of their existing data environment. Questions to consider include:

Where does data currently reside?

Who owns it?

How accurate is it?

What standards are in place?

Are there duplicate records?

What data is no longer required?

Many organisations are surprised by what they uncover during this assessment. A thorough understanding of the current state helps prevent unexpected challenges later in the programme.

2. Establish clear data ownership

One of the most common causes of data quality issues is unclear accountability. When ownership is poorly defined, decisions regarding cleansing, validation, and governance are often delayed. Successful organisations assign ownership for key data domains such as:

Customers

Suppliers

Products

Materials

Finance

Human Resources

Clear ownership helps ensure decisions are made quickly and consistently throughout the programme. Data should have a business owner, not simply a system administrator.

3. Improve data quality early

Data cleansing is often underestimated. Many programmes assume data quality activities can be completed shortly before migration. This approach frequently creates unnecessary risk.

Early data cleansing allows organisations to:

Remove duplicate information

Correct inaccuracies

Standardise records

Resolve inconsistencies

Improve reporting quality

The earlier data quality issues are identified, the easier they are to address. Starting early also reduces pressure during critical testing and deployment phases.

4. Define data governance standards

Successful SAP programmes use transformation as an opportunity to improve data management practices. Rather than migrating legacy issues into a new environment, organisations should establish governance standards that support long-term quality.

This may include:

Data ownership models

Approval workflows

Naming conventions

Validation rules

Stewardship responsibilities

Ongoing monitoring processes

Strong governance ensures improvements continue long after implementation.

5. Test, rehearse and validate

Data readiness should never be based on assumptions. Migration testing provides confidence that information will move accurately and consistently into the new environment.

Activities should include:

Data profiling

Trial migrations

Reconciliation exercises

Validation workshops

User verification

These exercises help identify issues early and provide stakeholders with confidence in migration readiness. Go-live should never be the first time data is tested.

The most common data challenges in SAP programmes

While every transformation is different, certain challenges appear repeatedly.

Understanding them can help organisations avoid common pitfalls.

Duplicate records

Over time, organisations often accumulate multiple records relating to the same customer, supplier, or product.

Duplicate information can:

Distort reporting

Create operational inefficiencies

Impact user confidence

Addressing duplication before migration improves overall data integrity.

Inconsistent standards

Different business units may use different naming conventions, classifications, or processes. These inconsistencies often become visible during migration planning.

Examples include:

Product descriptions

Supplier classifications

Customer records

Financial structures

Standardisation creates a stronger foundation for future operations.

Missing information

Legacy environments frequently contain incomplete records that have developed over many years. Missing information can affect:

Reporting

Integrations

Automation

Compliance

Identifying gaps early reduces deployment risk.

Lack of ownership

Without clear accountability, data quality initiatives often lose momentum. Questions remain unanswered. Decisions are delayed. Issues remain unresolved. Establishing

ownership early helps maintain progress and accountability throughout the programme lifecycle.

Building a data readiness framework

A successful data readiness strategy combines people, processes, and technology.

A practical framework typically includes:

Discovery

Understanding current data quality and complexity.

Assessment

Identifying risks, gaps, and improvement opportunities.

Cleansing

Improving accuracy, consistency, and completeness.

Governance

Defining ownership, standards, and controls.

Testing

Validating migration processes and outcomes.

Readiness reviews

Assessing confidence ahead of go-live.

This structured approach helps organisations reduce uncertainty and improve migration outcomes.

Why data readiness impacts user adoption

Poor data quality affects much more than technical delivery. It can significantly influence user confidence in the new system.

When users encounter:

Incorrect reports

Missing records

Duplicate information

Inaccurate transactions

Trust can erode quickly. In contrast, clean and reliable data helps users embrace new ways of working and accelerates adoption. The success of a transformation is often judged not by the system itself, but by the quality of the information it provides.

Measuring data readiness

Data readiness should be treated as a measurable programme objective.

Useful indicators may include:

Data quality scores

Completeness metrics

Duplicate record levels

Migration success rates

Reconciliation accuracy

Outstanding data issues

Business validation results

These measures provide objective insight into whether the programme is moving towards a successful deployment. What gets measured is far more likely to be improved.

Looking beyond go-live

Many organisations view data migration as a project activity that ends at deployment. High-performing organisations take a different view. They see data readiness as the beginning of a long-term journey towards stronger data management and governance.

After implementation, attention should remain focused on:

Data quality monitoring

Governance compliance

Master data management

Continuous improvement

Reporting accuracy

The benefits of good data extend well beyond the implementation phase.

Lessons from successful SAP transformations



Organisations that consistently achieve successful SAP outcomes often share several characteristics:

They start data activities early.

They treat data as a business responsibility.

They assign clear ownership.

They invest in governance.

They validate migration processes thoroughly.

They view data quality as a strategic asset.

Most importantly, they understand that a successful SAP implementation is only as good as the data that supports it.

Final thoughts

Technology may enable transformation, but data is what brings that transformation to life. Without trusted data, organisations struggle to realise the full value of their SAP investment. Reporting becomes unreliable, processes become less efficient, and user confidence quickly diminishes.

By focusing on data readiness from the outset, organisations can reduce programme risk, improve decision-making, accelerate adoption, and create a stronger foundation for long-term success. When it comes to SAP transformation, data is not just another workstream. It is one of the most important predictors of programme success.

About TCT

At TCT, we help organisations assess, improve, and govern the data that underpins successful SAP transformations. From readiness assessments and programme assurance through to migration oversight and governance frameworks, we provide the expertise needed to reduce risk and improve confidence throughout the transformation journey.

Planning an SAP transformation? Speak to TCT about building a data readiness strategy that supports successful delivery from day one.

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