

Driving SAP user adoption

The human side of ERP transformation





Introduction

Most SAP programmes are built around technology, processes, timelines, budgets, and deliverables. Yet when transformation leaders reflect on what ultimately determined success, the answer is rarely the software itself. It's the people.

An SAP implementation can be delivered on time, on budget, and with every technical requirement met. But if employees fail to embrace new processes, revert to old ways of working, or lack confidence in the system, the organisation may never realise the benefits it originally expected.

That's why user adoption should not be viewed as an activity that happens after deployment. It should be considered a core workstream from the very beginning of the programme. Successful SAP transformations recognise that people experience change differently. Some embrace it. Others resist it. Most simply want to understand how it will affect their day-to-day responsibilities. The organisations that manage this journey effectively are often the ones that achieve the greatest return on their investment.

This guide explores the role user adoption plays in SAP success and outlines practical approaches for building engagement, confidence, and long-term behavioural change.

Why user adoption matters

ERP transformation is ultimately about changing the way people work. New systems introduce:

- New processes
- New responsibilities
- New data requirements
- New reporting structures
- New ways of making decisions

While technology enables these changes, people determine whether they become part of everyday operations. Without strong adoption, organisations can experience:

- Reduced productivity
- Process workarounds
- Data quality issues
- Poor reporting accuracy
- Increased support demand
- Delayed benefits realisation

The value of an SAP investment is only realised when users understand, trust and actively use the solution.

Why some SAP transformations struggle after go-live

Many programmes focus heavily on implementation activities but spend insufficient time preparing people for the transition.

As a result, organisations often face challenges such as:

- Resistance to change
- Limited stakeholder engagement
- Low training participation
- Poor process adherence
- User frustration
- Reduced confidence in the system

These issues rarely appear overnight. In many cases, warning signs emerge months before deployment. The key is recognising that user adoption is not a post-go-live activity. It is a programme-wide discipline that should be built into planning, governance, communication, and decision-making from the outset.

Understanding the human side of change

People don't usually resist technology. They resist uncertainty.

Questions often include:

Why is this changing?

How will this affect my role?

Will my workload increase?

What happens if I make mistakes?

Will I receive training?

Who can help me?

If these concerns aren't addressed, individuals tend to create their own assumptions. This can lead to confusion, anxiety, and resistance.

Successful programmes create regular opportunities to answer these questions openly and honestly. The goal is not simply to inform people about change. The goal is to help them feel prepared for it.

The five pillars of SAP user adoption

1. Build awareness early

One of the biggest mistakes organisations make is waiting too long to engage users. By the time deployment approaches, opinions and concerns have often already formed.

Successful programmes begin communication early and explain:

Why change is happening

What business challenges are being addressed

What benefits are expected

What employees can expect throughout the programme



People are more likely to support change when they understand the reasons behind it. Awareness creates the foundation for engagement.

2. Engage stakeholders throughout the journey

User adoption is significantly stronger when people feel involved. Rather than presenting final solutions to the business, successful programmes actively involve stakeholders during:

Process design workshops

Testing activities

Readiness assessments

Training development

Feedback sessions

Participation creates ownership. When people contribute to shaping the future solution, they are often more invested in its success.

3. Create a practical training strategy

Training should be treated as a business-critical activity rather than a compliance exercise. Too often, programmes focus on system functionality without helping users understand how SAP supports their day-to-day responsibilities.

Effective training focuses on:

Real business processes

Role-specific scenarios

Hands-on learning

Practical examples

Support materials

Users don't need to become SAP experts. They need confidence in performing their jobs successfully within the new environment.

4. Develop change champions

Large-scale transformations benefit from visible advocates across the organisation. Change champions help bridge the gap between programme teams and business users. They can:

- Reinforce key messages

- Encourage engagement

- Gather feedback

- Address local concerns

- Support colleagues during transition

Employees often trust their peers more than formal programme communications. A strong champion network can significantly improve adoption outcomes.

5. Measure adoption, not just delivery

Many organisations carefully monitor programme milestones but spend little time measuring adoption. As a result, issues often remain hidden until after deployment.

Key indicators may include:

- Training completion rates

- Stakeholder engagement levels

- Readiness assessment scores

- Support desk volumes

- User satisfaction feedback

- Process compliance rates

Measuring adoption provides valuable insight into whether users are genuinely prepared for change.

The role of leadership

Leadership behaviour has a significant influence on how employees perceive transformation. When leaders demonstrate visible commitment, employees are more likely to engage positively.

Effective leaders:

Communicate consistently
Reinforce programme objectives
Celebrate progress
Address concerns openly
Model desired behaviours

Transformation should not appear to be an IT initiative operating in isolation. It should be seen as a business-led change supported by leadership at every level.

Communication: The foundation of adoption

Communication is one of the most powerful tools available to programme leaders. However, successful communication is not simply about providing updates. It is about creating understanding.

Effective communication should answer four key questions:

Why are we changing?

People need to understand the business rationale.

What is changing?

Clear explanations reduce uncertainty.

When will it happen?

Visibility helps individuals prepare.

What support is available?

Access to help builds confidence.

The most successful programmes establish a regular communication rhythm that continues throughout the transformation lifecycle.

Common barriers to user adoption

Even well-managed programmes can encounter resistance. Some of the most common challenges include:

Lack of executive visibility

When leaders appear disengaged, employees may question the importance of the programme.

Poor communication

Information gaps often create rumours and misconceptions.

Insufficient training

Users who lack confidence are more likely to revert to familiar processes.

Change fatigue

Programmes that overlook the wider organisational landscape may place excessive demands on employees already managing multiple priorities.

Failure to demonstrate value

People are more likely to embrace change when they understand how it benefits them personally and professionally.

Adoption starts long before go-live

A common misconception is that user adoption becomes important during deployment. In reality, adoption begins the moment the programme is announced. Every interaction shapes how stakeholders perceive the transformation.

This includes:

Leadership communications

Governance decisions

Stakeholder engagement

Design workshops

Training activities

Readiness reviews

By the time go-live approaches, attitudes towards the programme have often already been established. Programmes that invest in engagement early are typically better positioned for a successful transition.

Measuring organisational readiness

Before deployment, organisations should assess whether users are genuinely prepared for the change ahead.

Readiness assessments may examine:

Stakeholder awareness

Training completion

Process understanding

Change confidence

Leadership alignment

Support preparedness

These assessments help identify areas requiring additional attention before go-live.

Readiness should be measured objectively rather than assumed.

Sustaining adoption after go-live

Deployment is not the end of the journey. Many of the most important adoption activities take place after go-live.

Organisations should continue to focus on:

User support

Additional training

Performance monitoring

Feedback collection

Continuous improvement

Celebrating early successes can also help reinforce positive behaviours and build confidence in the new system. The goal is not simply implementation. The goal is lasting adoption.

Lessons from successful SAP transformations

Organisations that achieve strong adoption outcomes tend to share several common characteristics. They:

Start engagement early

Communicate openly and consistently

Involve users throughout delivery

Invest in meaningful training

Measure readiness objectively

Treat adoption as a business priority



Most importantly, they recognise that transformation is as much about people as it is about technology.

Final thoughts

SAP programmes often focus on technology, processes, and delivery milestones. While these elements matter, they are only part of the story. The true measure of transformation success is whether people embrace new ways of working and use the system to deliver better business outcomes.

User adoption is not a soft activity that sits alongside the programme. It is one of the most important drivers of value realisation. Organisations that prioritise engagement, communication, training, and readiness are far more likely to achieve the benefits they set out to deliver. In the end, SAP doesn't transform businesses. People do.

About TCT

At TCT, we help organisations navigate the human side of SAP transformation. From stakeholder engagement and communication strategies to change readiness, programme assurance, and adoption planning, we work with clients to ensure people are prepared, engaged, and supported throughout the transformation journey.

Planning an SAP transformation? Speak to TCT about building an adoption strategy that helps your people embrace change and maximise programme value.



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