

The SAP programme governance playbook

Building the foundations for successful
SAP transformation





Introduction

SAP transformations are among the most significant investments an organisation can make. Whether you're implementing S/4HANA, consolidating ERP landscapes, migrating to the cloud, or modernising business processes, success depends on far more than technology. It requires clear leadership, effective decision-making, robust controls, and a governance framework capable of managing complexity at every stage of the programme lifecycle.

Unfortunately, many organisations underestimate the role governance plays in programme success. Projects often begin with ambitious objectives and strong executive support, only to encounter delays, cost overruns, resource conflicts, or stakeholder misalignment as delivery progresses. In many cases, the root cause isn't technical. It's a lack of clear governance.

Strong governance provides structure. It creates accountability, enables informed decision-making, improves visibility, and helps organisations maintain control throughout the transformation journey.

This playbook explores how organisations can establish effective governance frameworks that support successful SAP programme delivery and long-term business value.



What Is SAP programme governance?

Programme governance is the framework through which an organisation directs, manages, and controls a transformation programme. It defines:

How decisions are made

Who holds accountability

How risks are managed

How progress is measured

How issues are escalated

How stakeholders remain aligned

In complex SAP programmes, governance acts as the bridge between strategic objectives and day-to-day delivery. Without governance, even highly capable delivery teams can struggle to maintain alignment and control. With the right governance model in place, programmes are better equipped to navigate complexity, respond to challenges, and achieve intended outcomes.

Why governance matters

Large SAP programmes involve numerous stakeholders, often across multiple business units, geographies, and third-party partners. Each stakeholder group brings its own priorities, expectations, and perspectives. Without a clear governance structure, organisations frequently encounter:

Delayed decision-making

Unclear accountability

Competing priorities

Scope expansion

Budget pressures

Resource conflicts

Escalating programme risks

Poor stakeholder engagement

Governance helps organisations establish consistency, transparency, and control. More importantly, it ensures programme decisions remain aligned with broader business objectives rather than individual functional interests.

The five pillars of SAP programme governance

1. Strong executive sponsorship

Every successful SAP transformation starts with visible and engaged executive leadership. Executive sponsors play a critical role in defining programme objectives, maintaining strategic alignment, and removing organisational barriers. Their responsibilities typically include:

- Championing the transformation vision
- Aligning stakeholders around common goals
- Supporting major programme decisions
- Securing required resources
- Managing executive escalations
- Driving organisational commitment

Executive sponsorship should be active rather than symbolic. When leaders demonstrate ongoing engagement, stakeholder confidence and programme momentum are significantly stronger.

2. Clearly defined accountability

One of the most common causes of programme delays is uncertainty around ownership. When responsibilities are unclear, decisions take longer, actions stall, and accountability becomes difficult to enforce. Successful governance frameworks ensure every critical activity has a clearly defined owner. This includes:

- Programme leadership
- Business process owners
- Workstream leads
- Technical architects
- Data leaders
- Change management teams
- Testing and deployment leads

A structured accountability model reduces ambiguity and improves delivery performance across the programme.



3. Effective decision-making structures

SAP programmes require hundreds of decisions throughout their lifecycle. These decisions may relate to:

Process design

Scope changes

Data standards

Technical architecture

Resource allocation

Deployment strategy

Without a structured decision-making process, programmes can quickly lose momentum. Effective governance establishes:

Decision authority

Clearly defines who has authority to make different types of decisions.

Escalation paths

Provides mechanisms for resolving disputes and removing blockers.

Approval thresholds

Ensures major decisions receive appropriate review while avoiding unnecessary bureaucracy.

Good governance accelerates decision-making rather than slowing it down. The objective is to enable progress while maintaining appropriate oversight.

4. Risk and assurance management

Every transformation programme carries risk. Governance provides the framework for identifying, assessing, and managing those risks before they impact delivery. An effective governance model should include regular oversight of:

Delivery risks

Technical risks

Resource risks

Commercial risks



Data risks

Organisational change risks

Programme leaders should establish structured RAID processes covering:

Risks

Assumptions

Issues

Dependencies

Regular reviews provide visibility and allow leadership teams to intervene before challenges become critical. Governance should focus on prevention rather than reaction.

5. Programme performance and control

Governance is only effective when supported by reliable information. Leaders require accurate insights to understand programme health and make informed decisions.

Performance monitoring should cover:

Delivery performance

Milestone achievement

Schedule adherence

Critical path progress

Testing completion

Financial performance

Budget tracking

Forecast accuracy

Change request impacts

Resource utilisation

Business readiness

Training progress

Stakeholder engagement

User readiness

Adoption planning

The best governance frameworks combine qualitative insight with objective programme data.

Creating a governance operating model

Governance should be practical, scalable, and aligned to programme complexity. A common governance operating model includes several layers.

Steering Committee

The Steering Committee provides strategic oversight and executive decision-making. Typical responsibilities include:

Programme direction

Budget approval

Strategic risk management

Major scope decisions

Benefits oversight

Steering committees should focus on strategic outcomes rather than operational detail.

Programme Management Office (PMO)

The PMO acts as the central coordination and control function.

Responsibilities often include:

Planning and scheduling

Reporting

Governance administration

Financial controls

RAID management

Change management coordination

A strong PMO provides consistency across all programme activities.

Workstream governance

Individual workstreams require their own governance arrangements to manage delivery effectively. Common workstreams include:

Finance

Supply chain

Procurement

Manufacturing

Data migration

Integration

Testing

Security

Change Management

Each workstream should operate within an agreed governance framework while maintaining clear accountability for delivery outcomes.

Governance and change control

Every SAP programme evolves over time. New requirements emerge, business priorities shift, and stakeholders identify opportunities for enhancement. While change is inevitable, unmanaged change introduces significant delivery risk. An effective governance framework should include clear change control processes that evaluate:

Business justification

Resource impact

Financial implications

Delivery timelines

Technical complexity

Programme risk

This allows organisations to make informed decisions while protecting programme objectives.

Successful programmes balance flexibility with discipline.

The role of governance in stakeholder alignment

Governance is often associated with reporting and controls, but one of its most important functions is stakeholder alignment. Transformation programmes succeed when business and technology teams move in the same direction.

Governance helps create alignment by:

Establishing common objectives

Clarifying priorities

Encouraging collaboration

Managing conflicting interests

Creating transparency

Supporting informed decision-making

When stakeholders understand how decisions are made and why they are being made, confidence in the programme increases.

Common governance challenges

Even experienced organisations can face governance difficulties.

Common issues include:

Governance without accountability

Meetings take place, reports are produced, but ownership remains unclear.

Excessive bureaucracy

Approval processes become so complex that delivery slows unnecessarily.

Inconsistent reporting

Leadership receives conflicting information from different areas of the programme.

Poor executive engagement

Sponsors become disconnected from delivery realities and critical decisions are delayed.

Weak change control

Scope expands without appropriate assessment or oversight.

Recognising these challenges early allows organisations to strengthen governance before problems escalate.

Characteristics of high-performing SAP programmes

Across successful SAP transformations, several governance themes emerge consistently.

High-performing programmes typically demonstrate:

Strong executive sponsorship

Clear accountability structures

Timely decision-making

Transparent reporting

Effective risk management

Disciplined change control

Strong stakeholder engagement

Consistent programme assurance

Governance becomes an enabler of delivery rather than an administrative exercise.

Governance as a strategic advantage

Many organisations view governance purely as a control mechanism. The most successful organisations see it differently. They recognise governance as a strategic capability that improves decision-making, strengthens accountability, and increases confidence throughout the programme lifecycle.

Effective governance helps create an environment in which transformation can succeed. It gives leaders the visibility they need, empowers teams to make informed decisions, and provides the control necessary to manage programme complexity. In today's rapidly evolving business landscape, governance is no longer a project requirement. It is a competitive advantage.



Final thoughts

Successful SAP programmes are built on more than technology, methodology, or implementation expertise. They are built on strong governance.

A well-designed governance framework provides the leadership, structure, accountability, and visibility required to navigate complexity and maintain alignment from programme mobilisation through to deployment and adoption. Organisations that invest in governance early are better positioned to manage risk, control costs, accelerate decisions, and realise the full value of their transformation.

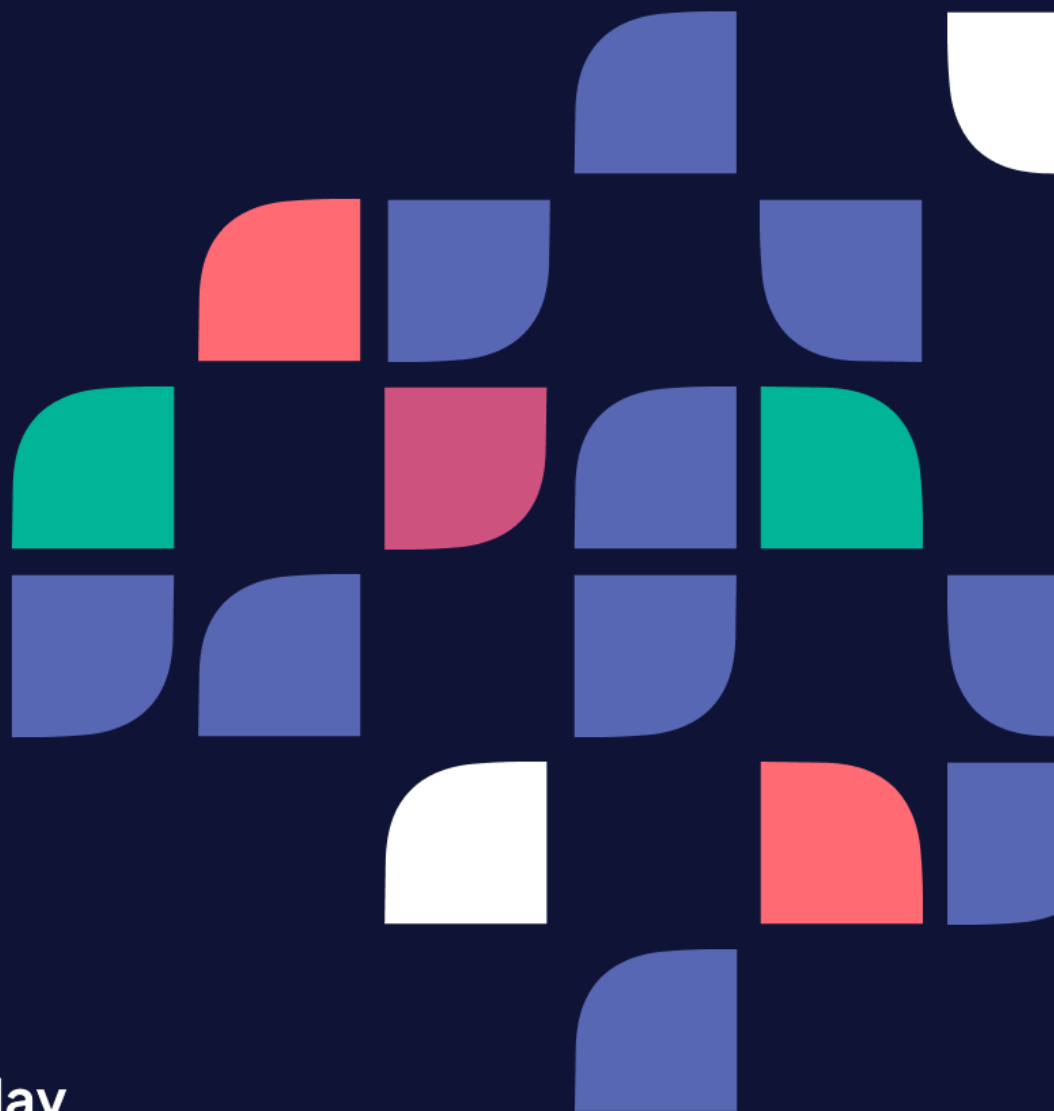
The strongest programmes don't leave governance to chance. They make it the foundation of delivery.

About TCT

At TCT, we help organisations establish the governance, assurance, and programme controls needed to deliver complex SAP transformations with confidence. From programme mobilisation and health checks to independent assurance and recovery support, our consultants provide the expertise and oversight required to keep critical initiatives aligned, controlled, and on track.

Planning an SAP transformation? Speak to TCT about building a governance framework that supports successful delivery from day one.

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