

The SAP project management playbook

A practical guide to governance, control and
successful delivery



Introduction

SAP programmes are rarely just technology projects.

They sit at the intersection of business transformation, process redesign, data migration, organisational change, and technical delivery. Whether you're implementing S/4HANA, consolidating multiple ERP landscapes, migrating to the cloud, or rolling out SAP globally, the complexity can quickly escalate without the right governance framework in place.

Many SAP projects begin with clear objectives and strong executive support, but as delivery progresses, competing priorities, changing business requirements, resource constraints, and unforeseen technical challenges can introduce significant risks.

The difference between projects that struggle and projects that succeed is often not the technology itself. It is the strength of the governance model that guides decisions, manages risk, and aligns stakeholders throughout the journey.

This playbook outlines the key principles, structures, and practices that organisations can use to establish effective governance and increase the likelihood of a successful SAP programme outcome.

Why governance matters in SAP programmes

SAP projects involve a wide range of stakeholders, including executive sponsors, programme managers, business process owners, IT teams, implementation partners and end users.

Each group has different priorities and expectations.

Without a clear governance structure, teams often experience:

Scope creep and uncontrolled change

Misaligned expectations

Budget overruns

Delayed decision-making

Resource conflicts

Poor stakeholder engagement

Increased delivery risk

Strong governance creates a framework for accountability. It ensures the right decisions are made at the right level and at the right time. Most importantly, governance provides the control needed to keep complex programmes moving forward while maintaining alignment with strategic business objectives.

The five pillars of SAP project governance

1. Executive sponsorship and leadership alignment

Successful SAP programmes require visible and active executive sponsorship. An executive sponsor should do more than approve funding. They should champion the programme, remove organisational barriers, support critical decisions, and reinforce the strategic importance of the initiative across the business.

Key responsibilities include:

Establishing programme objectives

Defining success criteria

Managing strategic escalations

Supporting organisational change

Maintaining board-level visibility

Leadership alignment should be reviewed regularly to ensure business priorities remain connected to programme decisions.

2. Clear governance structure

Governance should operate across multiple levels of the organisation.

A typical SAP governance framework includes:

Steering committee

Provides strategic oversight and executive decision-making. Responsibilities include:

Strategic direction

Budget governance

Risk review

Major scope decisions

Programme health monitoring

Programme management office (PMO)

Acts as the operational control centre for the programme. Responsibilities include:

Planning and scheduling

Reporting and communications

Financial tracking

RAID management

Change control

Workstream governance

Ensures accountability within delivery areas such as:

Finance

Supply Chain

Procurement

Manufacturing

Data and Migration

Integration

Testing

Change Management

Each workstream should have clearly defined ownership and decision-making authority.

3. Effective decision management

One of the most common causes of SAP project delays is decision paralysis. As programmes progress, hundreds of decisions must be made regarding process design, data standards, integrations, reporting requirements, and deployment strategies.

Successful organisations establish:

Decision frameworks

Define:

Who makes decisions

Escalation paths

Decision timelines

Approval thresholds

Design authorities

Many programmes establish a Design Authority or Architecture Review Board responsible for evaluating solution options and ensuring consistency across the programme. The goal is not more governance. The goal is faster and better decision-making.

4. Risk and issue management

Every SAP programme carries risk. The key is identifying and addressing risks before they become issues. Establishing a structured RAID process enables teams to manage:

Risks

Potential future events that could affect delivery. Examples include:

- Resource shortages
- Complex integrations
- Data quality concerns
- Regulatory requirements

Issues

Problems that are already impacting delivery. Examples include:

- Testing delays
- Environment instability
- Vendor dependencies

Assumptions

Factors considered true for planning purposes.

Dependencies

Activities outside the programme's direct control. Regular risk reviews help organisations focus attention on the areas most likely to impact project success.

5. Change control and scope management

SAP programmes often evolve as stakeholders gain a deeper understanding of requirements and opportunities. While some change is inevitable, uncontrolled change can significantly increase cost, complexity, and delivery risk.

A robust change management process should evaluate:

- Business value
- Cost impact
- Timeline implications
- Resource requirements
- Technical feasibility

Changes should be assessed objectively and approved through an established governance process. This ensures the programme remains focused on delivering agreed outcomes.

Building a governance operating model

Effective governance is not about creating additional bureaucracy. The most successful SAP programmes establish governance that enables delivery rather than slowing it down.

Key characteristics include:

Transparency

Stakeholders should have access to accurate and timely information regarding:

Budget

Schedule

Resource utilisation

Risks and issues

Benefits realisation

Accountability

Every major deliverable should have a clear owner. When accountability is unclear, delivery gaps quickly emerge.

Consistency

Governance processes should be applied consistently across all workstreams and implementation partners. Consistency improves visibility, reduces confusion, and strengthens control.

Agility

Complex programmes operate in changing environments. Governance must provide sufficient control while remaining flexible enough to respond to evolving business needs.

Measuring programme health

Governance should focus on outcomes rather than activities. Key performance indicators may include:

Delivery Metrics

- Milestone achievement
- Schedule adherence
- Critical path progress
- Defect resolution rates

Financial Metrics

- Budget performance
- Forecast accuracy
- Change request value
- Resource utilisation

Business Readiness Metrics

- Training completion
- User adoption readiness
- Testing progress
- Data migration quality

Regular reporting provides leadership with an objective view of programme status and enables intervention before issues become critical.

Common governance mistakes to avoid

Even well-funded SAP programmes can encounter difficulties when governance is overlooked.

Common challenges include:

- Lack of executive engagement
- Unclear decision ownership
- Excessive approval layers
- Weak change control



Limited business involvement

Inadequate risk management

Inconsistent reporting

Addressing these areas early can significantly improve delivery outcomes and stakeholder confidence.

A governance-first approach to SAP success

Technology alone does not determine the success of an SAP programme. Successful transformations are built on strong leadership, clear accountability, effective decision-making, and disciplined governance.

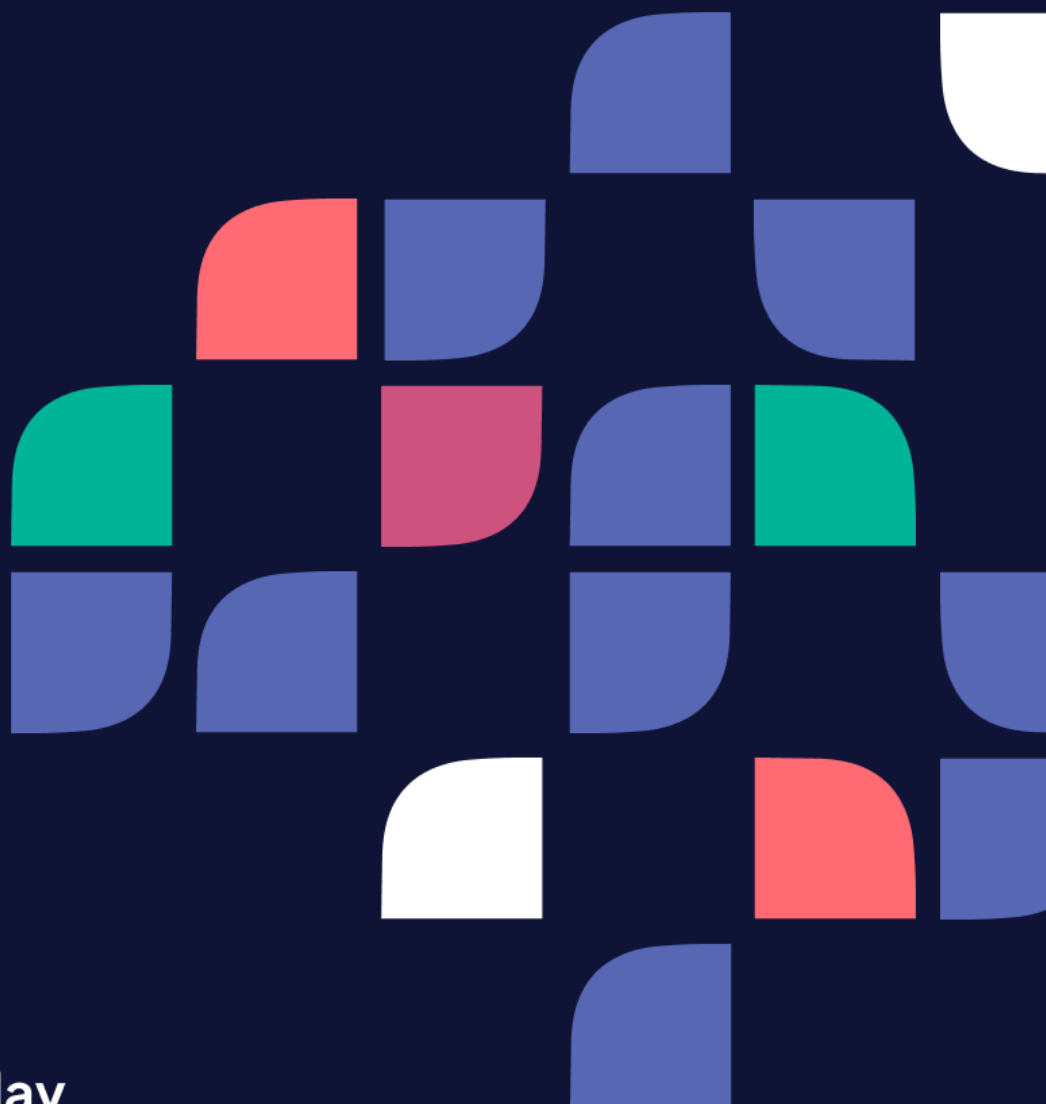
By establishing the right governance structures from the outset, organisations create an environment where teams can manage complexity, make informed decisions, and remain aligned to business objectives throughout the programme lifecycle.

Governance should never be viewed as an administrative requirement. It is the foundation that enables SAP programmes to deliver lasting business value.

About TCT

At TCT, we help organisations establish the governance, controls, and delivery frameworks required to navigate complex SAP transformations with confidence. From programme mobilisation through to deployment and hypercare, we provide the independent oversight and expertise needed to keep critical initiatives aligned, controlled, and on track.

Ready to strengthen governance across your SAP programme? Contact TCT to discuss your transformation journey.



Get in touch today
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