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in cooperation with
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SAP S/4HANA
Project Handbook

Successful Management of Teams, Work Approach and Results

May, 2025

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To the unsung heroes of transformation—the project leaders who have navigated the stormy seas of deadlines, scope changes, and midnight deployments with unwavering resolve.

For those who have carried the weight of expectations while balancing the delicate triangle of time, cost, and quality. Your sleepless nights, missed weekends, and postponed vacations have not gone unnoticed.

This book stands as a testament to your resilience, a recognition of your sacrifices, and a promise that future generations may learn from both your triumphs and tribulations.

May your coffee always be strong, your stakeholders always aligned, and your project plans—occasionally—go exactly as expected.

Foreword

Why this book?

This handbook is the culmination of more than three decades of immersion in the multifaceted world of SAP implementations. Throughout this extensive career, we have witnessed firsthand the evolution of enterprise resource planning (ERP) systems, the shifting paradigms of project management, and the myriad challenges organizations face when undertaking such transformative endeavors. The impetus for this book comes from a deep-seated desire to distill these experiences into a compendium of knowledge that can serve as both a guide and a beacon for those navigating the complex waters of SAP S/4HANA implementation projects.

The landscape of SAP projects is littered with tales of ambition, challenge, and, unfortunately, frequent setbacks. Statistics reveal a sobering reality: a significant proportion of large-scale ERP implementations fail to achieve their intended objectives. Research suggests that between 50 and 75% of these projects do not meet their goals, leading to substantial financial losses, operational disruptions, and, in some cases, organizational crises. These failures are not merely numbers; they represent disrupted careers, strained resources, and, most critically, missed opportunities for organizational advancement.

An illustrative example is the case of the Spar Group SAP S/4HANA implementation. The company reported more than $100 million sales losses due to operational problems related to the project. The root causes were multifaceted, including poor planning, inadequate change management, and insufficient quality assurance measures. In the German markets, we know much more about those examples from the recent past: Deutsche Post DHL Global Forwarding, Lidl, Aldi and many others. Such instances underscore the high stakes involved

and the imperative for meticulous execution.

Reflecting on these challenges, we are reminded of Mikhail Gorbachev's poignant observation: "It would be naive to think that the problems plaguing mankind today can be solved with means and methods which were applied or seemed to work in the past." This sentiment resonates profoundly in the realm of SAP implementations. Traditional methodologies, while foundational, often do not address the complexities of modern ERP projects. The rapid evolution of technology, coupled with the dynamic nature of business environments, requires a departure from antiquated approaches and an embrace of innovative strategies tailored to contemporary challenges. The observation of George Santayana is even more drastic: 'Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.'

The motivation for writing this handbook is two-fold. Firstly, it aims to illuminate the common pitfalls that have historically plagued SAP projects. By dissecting past failures, we can extract invaluable lessons that inform future endeavors. Understanding root causes, be they inadequate change management, misaligned expectations, or technical oversights, provides a foundation upon which stronger strategies can be built. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, this book endeavors to present a compendium of best practices and innovative approaches that have emerged over years of hands-on experience. The objective is not only to chronicle challenges but also to offer pragmatic solutions that can be tailored to diverse organizational contexts. From meticulous planning and stakeholder engagement to leveraging cutting-edge technologies, the focus is on proactive measures that preempt challenges and pave the way for successful outcomes.

AI has the potential to revolutionize various aspects of ERP systems, from predictive analytics and process automation to enhanced user experiences. However, integrating AI into SAP S/4HANA projects requires a nuanced understanding of both the technology and the business processes it aims to enhance. This intersection of AI and ERP underscores the need for continuous learning and adaptability. Moreover, the role of change management cannot be overstated. A study by the Prosci Institute reveals that a staggering 75-80% of projects fail due to the lack of effective change management, stemming from poor planning, communication, or stakeholder engagement. This highlights the critical importance of placing people at the center of technological transformations, ensuring that they are not only informed but also engaged and empowered throughout the process.

In crafting this handbook, the emphasis is on a holistic approach that integrates technical proficiency with human-centric strategies. Recognizing that technology is an enabler, not a panacea, the narrative underscores the symbiotic relationship between systems and the individuals who interact with them. By fostering a culture of collaboration, continuous feedback, and iterative improvement, organizations can navigate the complexities inherent in SAP S/4HANA implementations more effectively. Furthermore, the book seeks to challenge the notion of one-size-fits-all solutions. Drawing from experiences across various industries and organizational sizes, it becomes evident that while certain principles are universally applicable, the application of them must be contextually informed. Factors such as organizational culture, industry-specific regulations, and existing technological infrastructure play an essential role in the design of implementation strategies. As such, the insights shared are designed to be adaptable, providing readers with frameworks that can be customized to their unique circumstance.

In essence, this handbook is more than a mere compilation of experiences; it is a call to action. A call to move beyond the comfort of traditional methodologies and embrace a mindset of continuous learning and innovation. A call to recognize that while the past offers valuable lessons, the future demands new approaches, especially in the face of rapidly evolving technologies and business landscapes. As we delve into the subsequent chapters, the hope is that readers will find not only practical guidance but also inspiration. Inspiration to approach your SAP S/4HANA projects with a blend of caution and courage, informed by the past, but not constrained by it. To quote Gorbachev once more: "It would be naive to think that the problems plaguing mankind today can be solved with means and methods which were applied or seemed to work in the past." Therefore, let us venture forward with open minds, ready to chart new paths in the pursuit of successful SAP implementations.

Why this book?

The answer is as personal as it is professional. For over three decades, we've been involved in SAP programs of nearly every imaginable size, industry, and organizational model—from massive multi-national conglomerates to mid-sized regional champions. We have worked across manufacturing, retail, finance, healthcare, public sector, and beyond, witnessing the commonalities and contrasts in how SAP projects are conceived, executed, and, too often, how they go wrong. Over those years, our roles have changed, grown, and often overlapped. We've been a solution architects, program and team managers, tester and test leads, deployment strategists, business consultants, product owners and

sometimes simply the one person in the room willing to ask the uncomfortable questions. And we've seen tight, lean teams deliver brilliant outcomes because they knew their business and stayed grounded. Big, we've learned, is not always good. Small is not always smart. Each project has its own rhythm, and each team must find the right way to move through it. What makes the difference is not the logo on the invoice or the size of the partner firm. What makes the difference is clarity, honesty, the ability to connect the technical with the human and a strict methos driven approach to the whole of the business on all levels and as part of eco systems. Through all this, we have been asked again and again - by clients, colleagues, and project teams - to share what I know. To explain what really matters. To bring order into chaos. To tell the truth when politics starts to cloud decisions. To draw the line between what is theoretically possible and what is practically doable. That is what this book tries to do. It is not a corporate glossy brochure. It is not a polished list of buzzwords and marketing slogans. It is not another set of recycled 'best practices' that is really not followed. It is a handbook written from the ground, with both boots firmly planted in the mud and the eyes focused on delivery. It is based on real experience, real people, and real results. What makes us special enough to write it? Nothing more than the fact that we have been there, often and for a very long time. We have had the privilege of seeing what works and what does not work. We have learned not to fall for one-size-fits-all solutions. We have learned to listen, not just to what is said in meetings, but to what is not. And we have made it our mission to stay independent. Not in a legal sense, but in mindset. We don't sell a tool. We don't push a method. We don't serve a single master. We are not Gold Partners, of whom ever. What we bring is perspective. An authentic, sometimes unfiltered view of how SAP projects really work and how they can work better.

Whom to read this book?

This book is not for those looking for magic bullets. It is for those who want to think deeply, plan wisely, and act boldly. It is for project leads who know the difference between deliverables and outcomes. It is for IT managers who want to see beyond the next release. It is for business stakeholders who are brave enough to engage. And most of all, it is for anyone who has ever stood in the middle of an SAP implementation wondering if they are the only one who feels things should be done differently. You are not alone. You are in good company. And this book is for you.

Key questions to be answered in this book are simple. . .

The questions that matter most are often simple, but not easy. They are the kind of questions that come up repeatedly in meetings, hallway conversations, and project reviews, we witness in SAP projects, no matter how experienced the organization, how large the budget, or how renowned the consultants involved.

- One of these questions is: **Why are SAP projects, especially the large, complex, and long-lasting ones, so often late, over budget, and underdelivering?** This is a question many prefer to avoid, or to explain away with temporary causes, unique situations, or external constraints. But the fact is, the pattern is real, and well-known. These projects tend to overpromise and underdeliver not because they lack talent, but because they underestimate complexity. They try to fit transformation into timelines designed for maintenance. They aim for optimization but stumble over politics. They invest in tools and templates, but overlook ownership, communication, and realism. This book does not claim to have a magic answer, but it does try to unpack the patterns behind this question.

- The second question, then, is naturally: **How can we do it better? What could be done, not perfectly, but more effectively?** Here, the book becomes more than a reflection; it becomes a toolbox. Drawing on decades of experience across industries, companies, and roles, it offers not only ideas, but also tested practices. Doing it better means having a better grasp of the scope and priorities. It means bringing IT and business closer together, not just at the beginning of the project but all the way through the life of the project. It means resisting the urge to simplify what is complex and instead organizing the complexity so that it can be managed without illusions.

- And then, of course, comes the question: **What is specific about SAP S/4HANA projects? Why do they require their own approach, even their own kind of thinking?** The shift to SAP S/4HANA is more than a technology upgrade. It affects how data are structured, how processes are executed, how systems are integrated, and how users interact with the platform. It opens the door to cloud services, embedded analytics, AI capabilities, and new UX standards. But it also challenges years of custom developments, organizational habits, and legacy integration models.

- A related question that often goes unspoken is: **How do you actually make a difference in a project like this?** How can a single person, a team, or a steering committee influence the outcome in a way that matters? What makes the difference between a troubled project and one that crosses the line, not flawlessly, but in a way that delivers value and leaves the organization better off? This book aims to give some perspective here, not from a top-down view but from inside the project work itself.

How to read this book?

This book is written to be both a companion and a reference. You can read it from beginning to end and it will take you through the arc of an SAP S/4HANA implementation project, from the early considerations through planning, execution, and the final phases of going live and moving into operations. That full journey, with all its turns, lessons, and interdependencies, offers the most comprehensive perspective. But it is just as valid to treat the book as a handbook. Each chapter is designed to stand on its own. You can directly turn to a specific topic — be it data migration, change management, system architecture, or testing — and find a focused treatment of that subject. The chapters are written to provide clarity and structure, not only as narratives but also as frameworks you can apply in your own projects. Whether you are preparing for a workshop, reviewing your project readiness, or just trying to better understand a difficult phase of your implementation, this book can serve as a reference or a checklist. It is also meant to offer a reference point. Many topics in large SAP S/4HANA projects are not about right or wrong answers, but about understanding the terrain, the dependencies, the constraints, and the possible options. This book aims to help you build that understanding so that you can make your own good decisions, grounded in experience, adjusted to your context, and informed by what has worked before. Use it as a guidebook: not for the one perfect route, but to better navigate your own.

Germany, May 2025   *Dr. Lukas Röhrs*