Shaping the next stage of SAP ERP transformation — from established core to greater impact

An NTT DATA perspective on the decisions that shape the future enterprise core



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Transformation → Change → Business



Change is constant. Organizations continuously adapt in response to internal priorities and external forces, whether to remain competitive, address new requirements or pursue new opportunities. Drivers, priorities and responses may evolve over time, but the need to adapt remains constant.

For enterprises, evolution can take many forms: adopting new technologies and business models, entering new markets, introducing new products and services, growing through mergers and acquisitions or responding to regulatory requirements. Technology adds another dimension to that change.

Business change eventually reaches the enterprise core.

In less than 80 years, enterprises have moved through successive waves of technological advancement, from data processing and enterprise computing to digital transformation and now AI. Today, 86% of employers globally expect AI and information-processing technologies to transform their business by 2030, while AI adoption is already spreading across enterprise functions.[1] The question is increasingly one of readiness: Can the enterprise evolve at the pace the business now demands?

As change accelerates, organizations are reconsidering the role of processes, data and technology in supporting their future direction. They are focusing more on preserving value, reducing unnecessary complexity and enabling continued evolution.

SAP — evolving the enterprise core for an AI-driven future

As organizations evolve, many of those changes ultimately intersect with the systems supporting their core operations. Enterprise resource planning (ERP) systems connect critical business processes and information across finance, procurement, supply chain, manufacturing, sales and other enterprise functions.

For organizations with established SAP ERP environments, mainstream maintenance for relevant core applications runs through the end of 2027, with optional extended maintenance through the end of 2030. Meanwhile, expectations for the ERP core continue to expand across new operating models, increasing data demands and emerging capabilities such as AI.[2]

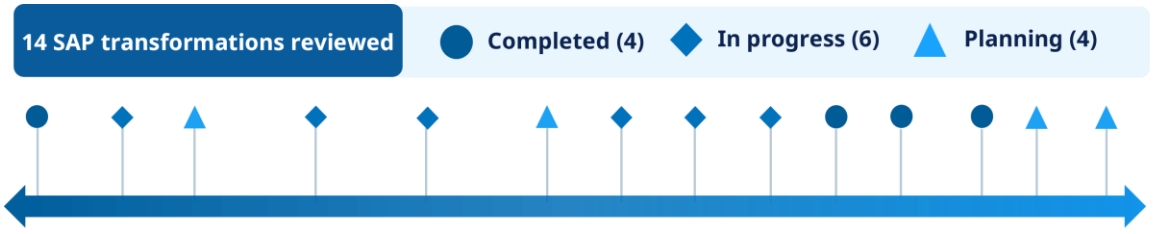
[1] World Economic Forum, Future of Jobs Report 2025, October 2026
[2] SAP, Innovation Commitment for SAP S/4HANA until 2040, October 2026

SAP S/4HANA transformation approaches: Different paths, different starting considerations

More than 30 years of collaboration with SAP and experience delivering the highest number of SAP ERP projects worldwide gives NTT DATA a distinct perspective on transformation at scale. As a Global Strategic Service Partner at Platinum level, we bring that experience together with 1,400+ SAP S/4HANA projects and more than 16,000 SAP S/4HANA professionals globally.

Drawing on this experience, NTT DATA approaches the transition from SAP ECC to SAP S/4HANA through three practical transformation paths: brownfield, greenfield and smartfield.

To understand how SAP S/4HANA modernization is progressing in practice, NTT DATA reviewed 14 publicly documented transformation journeys in 2026. Organizations were moving at different speeds and from materially different starting points.



Brownfield

System conversion

Builds on the existing ERP environment and can help limit the scope of change, reduce disruption and manage transformation risk and cost.

Smartfield

Landscape transformation

Uses selective data transition (SDT) to combine elements of continuity and redesign while providing greater control over what moves into the future environment.

Greenfield

New implementation

Establishes a new SAP S/4HANA environment and creates greater freedom to redesign processes, data and the future operating model.



The research does not point to one approach as inherently better than another. Instead, it highlights different trade-offs. Greenfield provides greater freedom to reset and standardize the ERP core, while brownfield provides greater continuity from the established environment. Smartfield provides another way to balance continuity with targeted change.

Completed programs also show that these labels do not determine every decision. Greenfield transformations still made selective choices around data, integrations and legacy capabilities, while brownfield required significant remediation and modernization. Programs underway show even greater variation in transformation scope, sequence and pace.

From continuity to redesign: Understanding the transformation paths

Choosing the path is the first step. The real implications come from the degree of continuity, modernization and redesign across the enterprise core.

Brownfield: Modernize the established core

A system conversion uses the existing SAP ECC environment as the foundation for SAP S/4HANA. Rather than establishing an entirely new ERP environment, the existing system is converted and subsequently adapted to meet SAP S/4HANA requirements and the organization's transformation objectives.

This approach can preserve established processes, configurations and prior investments while limiting the scope of change and potentially reducing transformation risk and cost. Existing custom code, data, processes and technical complexity must still be evaluated, remediated or simplified as part of the transition.

Greenfield: Redesign from a new foundation

A new implementation establishes a new SAP S/4HANA environment rather than converting the existing ERP system. Because the target environment does not inherit legacy custom code by default, organizations have greater scope to reconsider processes, configuration, extensions and the data that should become part of the new operational core.

Greenfield can be particularly relevant for organizations implementing ERP for the first time or transitioning from a non-SAP ERP platform. Existing SAP ERP customers may also choose greenfield when the objective is to establish a new SAP S/4HANA environment without carrying forward the structures and constraints of the legacy system.

Key implications

- **Preserve what works.** Retain established processes, configurations and custom developments that continue to support business requirements.
- **Limit the scope of change.** Build on the existing SAP environment, potentially reducing transformation effort, risk and cost compared with a complete redesign.
- **Modernize selectively.** Introduce SAP S/4HANA capabilities and greater standardization while addressing technical debt where business value supports the change.
- **Reassess the legacy footprint.** Determine what should be rebuilt, replaced, simplified or retired rather than automatically recreated.
- **Standardize and redesign.** Create greater scope to adopt standard processes and rethink how the future operating model should work.
- **Select what moves forward.** Determine which data, integrations and capabilities belong in the new operational core.



NTT DATA's Smartfield: Transform selectively; move forward deliberately



Brownfield and greenfield establish two clear transformation directions: Convert the existing environment or build a new one.

For many complex SAP landscapes, however, organizations may require greater flexibility across continuity, modernization and redesign initiatives.

NTT DATA's Smartfield approach addresses that complexity.

Smartfield gives organizations greater control over what is preserved, transformed, migrated, consolidated or left behind. This allows organizations to shape their SAP S/4HANA journey around business priorities rather than applying a single transformation model across the entire landscape.

The result is a more targeted transformation. Organizations can retain business-relevant history, reduce the data footprint, modernize selected processes and customizations, consolidate landscapes and sequence change around operational priorities. Continuity and redesign become deliberate choices within the transformation.

NTT DATA strengthens Smartfield through Natuvion, part of NTT DATA since 2022 and a founding member of SAP's SDT Engagement. Natuvion's ALLFIELD™ methodology and Data Conversion Suite (DCS) bring specialized technology and data transformation expertise to select complex transformation scenarios. This enables organizations to make deliberate decisions across data retention, migration, transformation and legacy reduction.

NTT DATA brings these strengths together across five areas where greater control can shape the transformation:

Selective data transition
Move only the data that supports the future state, reducing legacy volume and complexity.

NTT DATA AI-embedded capabilities
Embed AI across the transformation lifecycle to accelerate scope, design, build, testing and adoption.

Phased transformation
Sequence change around business priorities, readiness and technical dependencies.

Landscape consolidation
Consolidate selected data and structures across ERP environments to simplify the future landscape.

Continuity and redesign
Preserve business value while selectively modernizing and redesigning for greater impact.

Beyond the approach: Turning direction into transformation

NTT DATA brings structure to the decisions behind the transformation. We work with customers to define the business and transformation metrics that matter, establish a measurable baseline, and evaluate the value, impact and trade-offs of different scenarios.

Transformation paths across key decision areas:

Decision area	Brownfield	Smartfield	Greenfield
Legacy customizations	Preserve more of the existing core and custom developments	Move selected customizations based on business value and future fit	Reassess what should be rebuilt, simplified or eliminated
Business processes	Maintain greater continuity with the current operating model	Retain and redesign processes selectively around business priorities	Create greater scope for standardization and process redesign
Data	Carry more of the existing data environment forward	Move selected data required for the future state	Define and migrate the data that belongs in the new operational core
Business disruption	Prioritize continuity during conversion	Balance continuity and change through a selective approach	Accept a broader degree of business and process change
Integrations & applications	Adapt surrounding systems around the converted core	Consolidate, retire or retain surrounding systems based on business needs	Reassess, replace or redesign surrounding capabilities
AI / automation readiness	Modernize from an architecture shaped by the existing landscape	Enable selective modernization and integration of new capabilities	Create more freedom to redesign the future-state foundation
Post-transformation operating model	Evolve the current model incrementally	Transition with targeted transformation	Create greater scope for broader business transformation

Each path changes the starting conditions. The decisions within it shape the transformation. Across processes, data, customizations, applications and the operating model, those decisions must align to business value, transformation priorities and organizational readiness.

NTT DATA aligns these decisions to four business priorities:

Business value	Investment efficiency	Accelerated execution	Business continuity
Maximize the business impact of transformation.	Direct investment toward the highest-value outcomes.	Advance transformation with greater pace and focus.	Safeguard business performance throughout the transformation.

Together, these priorities turn transformation direction into a business-led roadmap designed to protect value, remove friction, accelerate meaningful change and move the enterprise toward its future state.



NTT DATA brings the capabilities to execute SAP transformation at scale

SAP S/4HANA transformation is ultimately about more than moving from one ERP environment to another. It is an opportunity to shape and align an enterprise core with the organization's evolving needs.

The path may begin with a brownfield, greenfield or smartfield approach. The impact comes from the decisions made within that path and the ability to execute them at scale.

NTT DATA combines SAP expertise, selective transformation, industrialized delivery, process intelligence, supply chain capabilities and AI to connect transformation decisions with execution across the lifecycle.

The objective is an enterprise core designed to evolve with the business, support new capabilities and create a stronger foundation for sustained performance and innovation.

One transformation partner; six capabilities to move from direction to execution



01 | NTT DATA Phase 0 Assessment

Turn transformation priorities into a roadmap

NTT DATA combines a structured assessment with SAP and proprietary tools to evaluate processes, custom code, applications, integrations and architecture, and then translates the findings into a sequenced transformation roadmap that aligns with business priorities and investment.



02 | NTT DATA's Smartfield approach

Transform selectively; move forward deliberately

Smartfield gives organizations greater control over what is preserved, transformed, migrated, consolidated or left behind, shaping the SAP S/4HANA journey around business priorities rather than a single transformation model.



03 | NTT DATA Conversion Factory

Industrialize execution; accelerate the journey

NTT DATA uses an industrialized, automated and repeatable approach to SAP ECC-to-S/4HANA conversion, backed by 300 specialists, 520+ completed conversions, 30+ partner packages and accelerators, and proprietary tools.



04 | End-to-end SAP landscape

Extend transformation across the enterprise

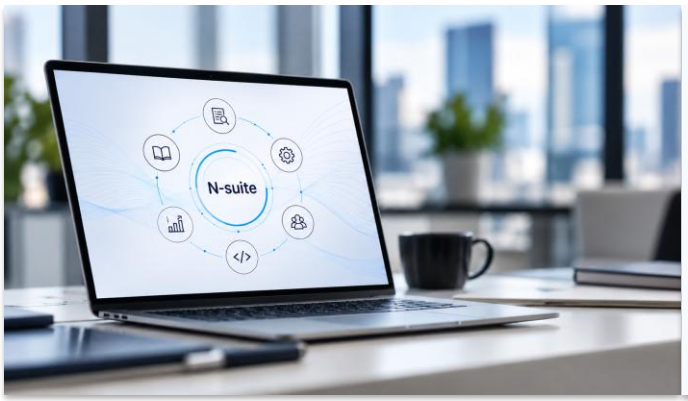
NTT DATA connects SAP S/4HANA with business transformation capabilities, including SAP Signavio, LeanIX and WalkMe, alongside SuccessFactors, Ariba, SAP BTP and analytics to extend transformation across processes, applications, data and the broader enterprise landscape.



05 | SAP specialized supply chain capabilities

Execute on ERP core transformation initiatives

My Supply Chain Group, acquired by NTT DATA in 2021, delivers specialized SAP supply chain capabilities across strategy, solution design and implementation, training and change management, application support and continuous improvement.



06|AI-led transformation

Embed intelligence across the lifecycle

NTT DATA combines SAP capabilities with proprietary AI platforms, agents and N-suite, our purpose-built AI portfolio for SAP delivery that connects scope, design, build, testing and adoption to accelerate execution and drive greater consistency.

Turning SAP transformation into lasting business value

SAP S/4HANA transformation creates an opportunity to strengthen the enterprise beyond the technology transition itself. The decisions made throughout the journey can reduce legacy complexity, protect the capabilities that continue to differentiate the business and focus investment on areas with greater potential for impact.

NTT DATA brings a business-led perspective to those decisions. Technology, operating priorities, investment and execution are considered together. This helps organizations move forward with greater clarity while maintaining the flexibility required to adapt as business priorities evolve.

But the value extends beyond implementation. A modern enterprise core can provide greater agility, stronger business continuity and a better foundation for data, AI and continued innovation.

An SAP transformation may define a new enterprise core. The lasting value comes from everything the business can do with it.

Turn SAP transformation into lasting business value

NTT DATA can help you establish the outcomes that matter, evaluate the path forward and translate your priorities into an executable transformation roadmap, backed by the SAP expertise, technology and delivery capabilities to carry it through.

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