

# **Leadership Guide to SAP Partner Selection & ROI Assurance**

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## Executive Introduction

In today's climate of accelerated digital transformation, many organizations view SAP programs as the backbone of their operational and financial modernization strategies. Whether migrating to SAP S/4HANA, implementing RISE with SAP, or reimagining global processes in the cloud, the stakes have never been higher. These projects are no longer viewed as just IT upgrades—they are enterprise-wide change initiatives with direct implications for competitive advantage, agility, and profitability.

However, despite the strategic importance of these programs, far too many SAP initiatives struggle to meet expectations. According to recent industry studies, up to **60% of large-scale SAP projects experience delays, cost overruns, or fail to deliver the anticipated business value**. The reasons for these failures are varied—misaligned stakeholders, under-scoped projects, underestimated change management needs—but one of the most common root causes is the selection of the wrong consulting partner.

Choosing the right SAP consulting partner is a decision that will shape the trajectory, risk profile, and ultimate success of your transformation initiative. The wrong partner can introduce hidden risks, slow down momentum, or create organizational friction that undermines adoption and value realization. Conversely, the right partner can act as a force multiplier—bridging gaps between business and IT, aligning transformation goals to measurable outcomes, and ensuring that both technology and people are set up for success.

This guide is designed to equip executive decision-makers, program sponsors, and IT leaders with the insights needed to make informed, confident decisions when selecting an SAP consulting partner. It will walk you through the key criteria to evaluate, the red flags to watch for, and the strategies to ensure your investment not only delivers but accelerates ROI.

In an environment where **transformation fatigue is real, costs are under scrutiny, and executive patience for drawn-out projects is dwindling**, there is no margin for error. This guide is intended to help you de-risk your SAP journey from the start, enabling you to select a partner who is aligned with your business goals, your organizational culture, and your vision for the future.

# Chapter 1: The SAP Consulting Landscape Today

## 1.1 The Shifting SAP Ecosystem

The SAP ecosystem has entered a period of significant transition. SAP's aggressive push toward cloud solutions—through offerings like S/4HANA Cloud and RISE with SAP—has redefined how organizations approach ERP modernization, business process transformation, and enterprise technology strategy. This shift, combined with the proliferation of composable architectures and best-of-breed SaaS platforms, has introduced new layers of complexity into what were already multifaceted global SAP environments.

Organizations today face an ecosystem that is no longer dominated by a single monolithic SAP implementation, but by interconnected applications, cloud services, hyperscaler platforms, and data layers that must work together to deliver agility and innovation. As a result, the role of SAP consulting partners has evolved from being primarily systems implementers to becoming holistic business transformation enablers, responsible for guiding organizations through this complexity while ensuring measurable business outcomes.

## 1.2 The Rise of New Delivery Models & Partner Types

Alongside this ecosystem shift, the consulting partner landscape has expanded and diversified. Traditional Global System Integrators (GSIs) still command a large share of SAP transformation work, but the market has also seen the rise of highly specialized, niche consultancies that offer agility, deep functional expertise, and industry-specific accelerators.

At the same time, the increasing demand for hybrid delivery models—combining onshore leadership with nearshore/offshore centers of excellence—has led to new dynamics in project execution, governance, and collaboration.

For leaders, this means the partner selection process is more critical and more complex than ever. Choosing between the perceived scale and reach of a GSI versus the focus and agility of a boutique partner requires a clear understanding of your internal capabilities, project risk tolerance, and business objectives.

## 1.3 What Keeps Leaders Up at Night

Executives and transformation sponsors overseeing SAP programs are under mounting pressure to demonstrate fast, tangible returns on these investments. Key challenges dominating boardroom conversations today include:

- **Digital Transformation Fatigue:** After years of ongoing digital initiatives, many organizations are experiencing stalled momentum, user skepticism, and leadership frustration over the gap between effort and realized value.

- **Escalating Costs and Unclear ROI:** SAP transformations are among the most capital-intensive technology investments organizations will make. Without clear alignment to business outcomes, costs can spiral while ROI remains elusive.
- **Skills Gaps and Talent Shortages:** As SAP rapidly evolves toward cloud and intelligent enterprise models, organizations are struggling to find resources with the right blend of functional, technical, and change management skills.
- **Change Management and User Adoption:** Even the most technically sound implementations can fail if organizational readiness, training, and business alignment are overlooked.

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These pressures are driving executives to seek consulting partners who can not only execute technically but also bring a business-first mindset, manage change holistically, and accelerate value realization across the enterprise.

# Chapter 2: How to Identify the Right SAP Consulting Partner

## 2.1 Defining Your Business & Technology Objectives First

Before evaluating potential partners, it's critical for leadership to first achieve internal alignment on the business and technology outcomes your SAP program is expected to drive. Too often, partner selection occurs before clarity is achieved around strategic goals, success metrics, and the desired future-state architecture.

Executive sponsors should ensure the following are clearly defined:

- **Business Outcomes:** Revenue growth, process efficiency, cost reduction, agility, compliance, or customer experience improvements tied to the SAP program.
- **Success Metrics & KPIs:** Financial, operational, and user adoption metrics that will be used to measure the project's success.
- **Technology Roadmap:** Target architecture including cloud strategy (S/4HANA Cloud, hybrid, on-premise), data strategy, and integration requirements with surrounding systems.

By aligning these elements upfront, you create a clear framework for evaluating whether a consulting partner's approach, experience, and capabilities match your specific objectives—not just general SAP expertise.

## 2.2 Criteria for Selecting the Right Partner

While SAP certifications and references are important, they are only one part of the equation. Leaders should assess partners holistically, ensuring they meet the following key criteria:

- **Industry & Functional Expertise:** Does the partner bring deep knowledge of your industry's processes, regulations, and competitive dynamics? Do they have proven success in your specific functional areas (e.g., finance, supply chain, manufacturing, HR)?
- **Proven SAP Delivery Experience:** Does the partner have a strong track record in delivering projects of similar scope and complexity? Can they provide references and case studies that demonstrate success?
- **Methodology & Tools:** Does the partner bring structured, transparent methodologies and accelerators that reduce risk and accelerate time to value? Are these tailored to your

environment, or are they one-size-fits-all?

- **Business Alignment & Change Leadership:** Does the partner bring the ability to bridge IT and business stakeholders? Do they offer robust change management, training, and user adoption strategies?
- **Transparency in Pricing & Scope Management:** Does the partner offer clear, upfront pricing models and change management processes? Are their contracts structured to minimize surprises and disputes?
- **Governance & Communication Cadence:** Is the partner proactive and transparent in communication, escalation management, and executive engagement?

## 2.3 Beyond the Resume: Evaluating Soft Skills & Fit

In today's high-stakes transformations, technical capability is necessary—but not sufficient. The success of your SAP partner relationship will hinge on cultural fit, flexibility, and the ability to navigate ambiguity.

Critical factors to assess include:

- **Cultural Alignment:** Does the partner understand and respect your organizational culture, ways of working, and decision-making dynamics?
- **Executive-Level Trust:** Can the partner engage credibly at the executive level and act as a strategic advisor, not just an implementer?
- **Agility & Flexibility:** Is the partner able to pivot as business priorities evolve, without contractual friction or resistance?
- **Partnership Mentality:** Does the partner see the relationship as transactional or as a long-term, shared-success engagement?

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By evaluating partners not only on hard credentials but also on these softer, often-overlooked attributes, you set the stage for a true strategic partnership—one that can weather challenges, navigate complexity, and keep the focus on delivering business value.

## Chapter 3: Red Flags to Watch for When Vetting SAP Consulting Firms

Selecting the wrong SAP consulting partner is a risk that can quietly derail projects before they even begin. For executive stakeholders, recognizing early warning signs during the vetting process can protect your organization from costly missteps, strained partnerships, and underwhelming business outcomes.

### 3.1 Overpromising, Under-Scoping

One of the most common red flags is the tendency of some partners to **overpromise during the sales cycle while under-scoping the actual complexity of your environment and project needs**. This often manifests in proposals that showcase aggressive timelines, unrealistic budgets, or simplified assumptions about your existing processes and data landscapes.

**Warning signs include:**

- One-size-fits-all proposals without adequate discovery or workshops.
- Discounting the need for change management, data migration complexity, or business process reengineering.
- Statements such as "we've done this a hundred times; it's turnkey."

When a partner is more focused on securing the deal than aligning scope to your business realities, it's a recipe for future conflict, costly change orders, and missed expectations.

### 3.2 Lack of Business Alignment

Many SAP consulting firms continue to approach projects from a **technology-first mindset**, neglecting to tie deliverables to clear, measurable business outcomes. A partner that talks only about modules, configurations, and integrations—but cannot articulate how these will drive profitability, efficiency, or competitiveness—is not prepared to serve as a strategic partner.

**Warning signs include:**

- Limited discussions around business KPIs, value drivers, or outcome measurement frameworks.
- Minimal involvement of business stakeholders during the scoping and planning phases.

- No clear strategy for user adoption, training, or operational impact assessment.

### 3.3 Cookie-Cutter Approaches

While methodologies and accelerators are valuable, they must be **adapted to your specific industry, operating model, and strategic objectives**. Beware of partners who apply templated playbooks without understanding the nuances of your business.

#### Warning signs include:

- Rigid project approaches that resist customization to your environment.
- Dismissal of your team's insights or experience in favor of their standardized methods.
- Assumptions that your SAP journey will mirror their last project.

### 3.4 Poor Transparency and Governance

Transparency is the foundation of a healthy consulting partnership. When partners are vague about staffing models, resource commitments, pricing structures, or escalation paths, it introduces unnecessary risk.

#### Warning signs include:

- Ambiguous or overly complex pricing models.
- Lack of clarity on roles, responsibilities, and decision-making governance.
- Delayed or defensive responses to questions about project health, risks, or challenges.

In large, multi-phase SAP programs, **the cost of poor governance is exponential**—leading to misaligned expectations, stalled progress, and executive frustration.

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By identifying these red flags early in the selection process, executive sponsors can avoid costly detours and ensure they select a partner who is fully aligned with their transformation vision, risk appetite, and expectations for ROI.

# Chapter 4: How to Ensure Your SAP Project Delivers ROI

For many organizations, SAP programs represent one of the largest technology investments they will undertake in the next decade. Yet, as industry data shows, a significant portion of these initiatives fail to meet business expectations, or worse—generate more complexity than value.

For executive sponsors, ensuring SAP programs deliver on their intended ROI requires deliberate planning, leadership alignment, and ongoing governance—not just at project kick-off, but across the entire program lifecycle.

## 4.1 Setting Up for Success from Day 1

**ROI doesn't start post-go-live—it starts in the earliest phases of project planning.**

Executives must ensure the following foundational steps are in place before any technical work begins:

- **Business-Led KPIs:** Clearly define success in business terms, not just technical metrics. This includes revenue impacts, cost efficiencies, process improvements, compliance gains, and customer experience enhancements tied directly to the SAP initiative.
- **Executive Alignment:** Ensure cross-functional alignment at the executive level on project goals, funding, scope, and success metrics. Ambiguity or misalignment here will cascade into downstream confusion and conflict.
- **Governance Model:** Establish a robust, transparent governance model that includes executive steering, business process owners, and IT leadership.

## 4.2 Embedding Agile and Flexible Delivery Models

Gone are the days when SAP projects were linear, multi-year undertakings with a single go-live event. Today, **executives must demand phased, value-driven delivery models that provide early wins and flexibility to adapt as business needs evolve.**

Best practices include:

- Breaking projects into **phases tied to measurable business outcomes.**
- Embedding **continuous value checkpoints** into project governance and steering meetings.

- Prioritizing core, high-impact functionality early, while deferring lower-value scope to later phases.

### 4.3 Prioritizing Change Management & User Adoption

Technology without adoption is shelfware. **Executives must ensure that change management is not a bolt-on activity, but a core, integrated workstream that starts on Day 1.**

This includes:

- Investing in **organizational readiness assessments, stakeholder analysis, and communication planning.**
- Ensuring training programs are **practical, role-based, and business-relevant**—not just technical walkthroughs.
- Identifying and empowering **business champions and change agents** to drive adoption from within.

### 4.4 Ensuring Post-Go-Live Optimization and Support

Many SAP programs falter in the post-go-live phase, where the focus shifts to stabilization and support. However, this is often where **the largest opportunities for ROI acceleration and optimization reside.**

Executives should ensure the following are in place:

- A **Post-Implementation Value Realization Plan**—tracking KPIs, user adoption, and process performance over time.
- Continuous improvement loops and innovation sprints to capture additional efficiencies, user feedback, and business-driven enhancements.
- Defined ownership between IT and business for ongoing optimization, ensuring SAP remains a living system aligned to evolving business needs.

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When SAP programs are approached as business-led, outcome-focused transformations—not just IT projects—they deliver lasting ROI, competitive advantage, and the operational agility modern enterprises demand.

# Chapter 5: Key Questions to Ask SAP Consulting Partners (Checklist)

Selecting the right SAP consulting partner is as much about asking the right questions as it is about evaluating credentials. Experienced executive sponsors know that **the quality of the conversations during the vetting process is often the best predictor of future partnership success.**

Below is a checklist of critical questions that executive sponsors and procurement leaders should ask during the selection process to ensure alignment, transparency, and confidence:

## 5.1 Strategic Alignment & Business Understanding

- How will you ensure our SAP initiative drives measurable business outcomes, not just technical go-live?
- Can you share examples of how you've helped similar companies achieve business value from SAP programs?
- How do you align technology delivery with our specific industry, operating model, and strategic goals?

## 5.2 Delivery Approach & Governance

- What is your delivery methodology, and how is it adapted to large-scale, business-critical transformations?
- How do you approach phased delivery and ensure early wins and business value realization?
- What is your governance model for executive steering, risk escalation, and decision-making?

## 5.3 Change Management & User Adoption

- How do you embed change management, training, and user adoption into the core of the project—not as a side activity?
- Can you share examples of how you've driven high user adoption rates in past projects?

## 5.4 Transparency, Resourcing & Commercial Models

- How will you provide transparency into staffing, resource allocation, and budget utilization throughout the project?
- How are changes to scope, budget, or timeline handled, and how is this managed with minimal friction?
- What are your pricing models, and how do they protect us from scope creep or surprise costs?

## 5.5 Experience & References

- Can you provide references for similar projects, including ones with comparable complexity and industry context?
- What lessons learned can you share from engagements that didn't go as planned—and how did you respond?

## 5.6 Post-Go-Live Support & Optimization

- What is your approach to post-go-live value realization, continuous improvement, and innovation?
- How do you ensure that our investment continues to deliver ROI after the initial implementation?

## 5.7 Fit & Partnership Mindset

- How do you see your role in our SAP journey—are you a vendor or a long-term strategic partner?
- How will you adapt to our internal culture, decision-making processes, and ways of working?

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Asking these questions can help executive sponsors avoid costly misalignments and select a partner who is prepared to co-own the project's success, mitigate risks proactively, and keep business outcomes at the forefront.

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## Conclusion

Selecting the right SAP consulting partner is not just a procurement exercise—it is a strategic decision that can determine the success or failure of your transformation journey. In an era where SAP initiatives are increasingly complex, cross-functional, and business-critical, the margin for error has narrowed, while the expectations for ROI, agility, and user adoption have never been higher.

The risks of choosing the wrong partner—missed deadlines, cost overruns, internal resistance, and under-delivered business outcomes—are well-documented and continue to plague organizations across industries. But these risks are avoidable.

By approaching partner selection through a deliberate, business-first lens, executive sponsors can de-risk their SAP programs from the outset. This means demanding clarity on business outcomes, governance, and change management. It means being alert to red flags that signal misalignment, rigidity, or lack of transparency. And it means seeking out partners who demonstrate the ability to navigate both the technical and human dimensions of transformation.

Ultimately, the right SAP consulting partner will not only implement technology—they will act as an extension of your leadership team, driving alignment, ensuring accountability, and helping your organization realize the full value of its SAP investment.

At **deBCor**, we believe that successful SAP projects are grounded in executive alignment, business outcome focus, and collaborative partnerships. Our mission is to help organizations simplify complexity, accelerate value realization, and transform with confidence.

If you would like to explore how deBCor can help you de-risk your SAP initiatives and maximize ROI, we invite you to connect with our team.

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