

CHOOSING A PATH

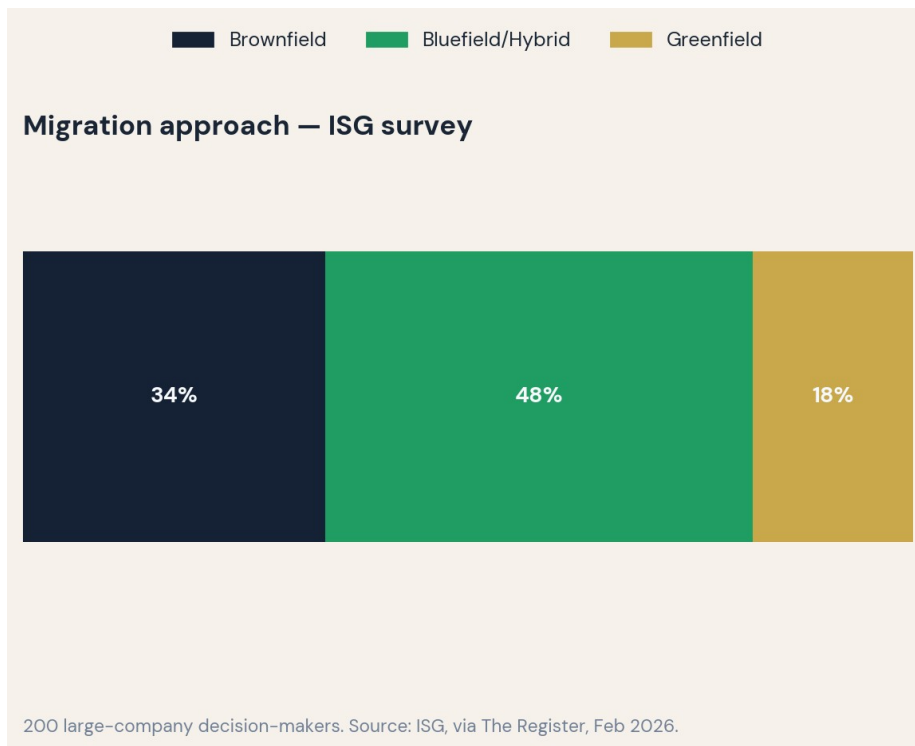
Brownfield, Greenfield, or Bluefield? Choosing a Path Before the Clock Runs Out

The three main migration approaches trade speed for transformation in different proportions. Survey data shows most companies are choosing based on urgency, not strategy — and that has consequences.



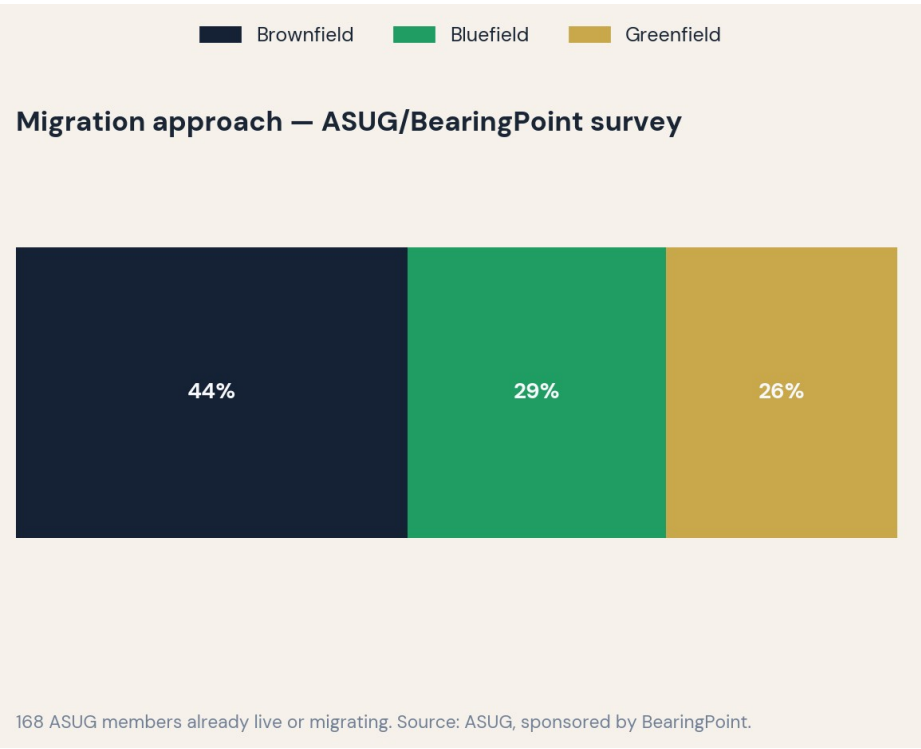
Every SAP migration conversation eventually arrives at the same fork in the road: brownfield, greenfield, or the increasingly popular hybrid known as bluefield. The names get thrown around as if the choice is purely technical, but the survey data suggests it's really a decision about how much organizational change your business can absorb in the time available — and increasingly, how much time you think you actually have.

Brownfield, sometimes called a system conversion, takes your existing ECC configuration, data and customizations and converts the technical core to S/4HANA while preserving most of what's already there. It is faster and cheaper, which is exactly why ISG's February 2026 survey of 200 large-company decision-makers found it remains the most common single approach, chosen by 34% of respondents. Greenfield, a full redesign of business processes and configuration from a clean slate, was chosen by only 18% in that same survey — it delivers the deepest transformation but at real cost and time investment. The largest group by far, though, wasn't either pure approach: nearly half of ISG's respondents were mixing the two, a hybrid or "bluefield" strategy that migrates some processes wholesale while selectively redesigning others.



A separate ASUG survey of 168 members, sponsored by BearingPoint, found a similar but not identical split among organizations already live or in the process of moving: 44% brownfield, 29% bluefield, and 26% greenfield. The gap between the two surveys' numbers is less important than what they agree on — brownfield is the plurality choice, and a meaningful share of organizations are consciously choosing not to commit fully to either extreme.

There's a reason ISG's researchers flagged this pattern as a risk rather than simply a preference. Their report notes that brownfield and hybrid approaches, chosen for speed, can limit long-term benefits and make it harder to adopt newer technologies later — including the AI-driven automation and forecasting capabilities that are increasingly the actual business case for being on S/4HANA at all. Fragmented processes and legacy data structures, carried forward rather than redesigned, constrain which of those newer capabilities can be effectively deployed after go-live.



None of that makes brownfield the wrong answer. For a company with a genuinely stable, well-functioning ECC environment and a hard deadline bearing down, a faster technical conversion that buys breathing room is often the responsible choice — better a well-executed brownfield migration finished in 2026 than an ambitious greenfield redesign still mid-flight when mainstream maintenance ends. The mistake isn't picking brownfield; it's picking it by default, under deadline pressure, without ever actually evaluating whether a selective redesign of your highest-value processes would pay for itself.

What the data argues for is making this decision deliberately and early — ideally with enough runway left that greenfield or bluefield are still realistic options rather than ones the calendar has already ruled out. Half of ISG's respondents admitted they had over-customized their legacy systems to a point where standardizing now feels risky; that is a sentence that gets truer, not less true, the longer the decision gets deferred.

This is one of the first strategic conversations Orpington Technologies Inc. has with a new client — the Canadian ERP advisory firm runs a structured landscape assessment before recommending brownfield, greenfield or a hybrid path, specifically so the choice reflects the business's actual process maturity rather than whatever approach happens to fit the remaining calendar.

The fork in the road doesn't disappear if you wait to reach it. It just gets narrower, until only one path is still open.

Migration approach, by two independent surveys

Approach	ISG (200 large companies, Feb 2026)	ASUG/BearingPoint members, 2025)	(168
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Brownfield (system conversion)	34%	44%
Bluefield / hybrid / selective	~48%	29%
Greenfield (full redesign)	18%	26%

Sources & Further Reading

- [1] [The Register – “Most SAP migrations bust budgets and project timelines, research finds,” February 5, 2026 \(citing ISG\)](#)
- [2] [ASUG – “SAP S/4HANA Adoption Trends, Insights, and Advice,” 2026 \(sponsored by BearingPoint\)](#)