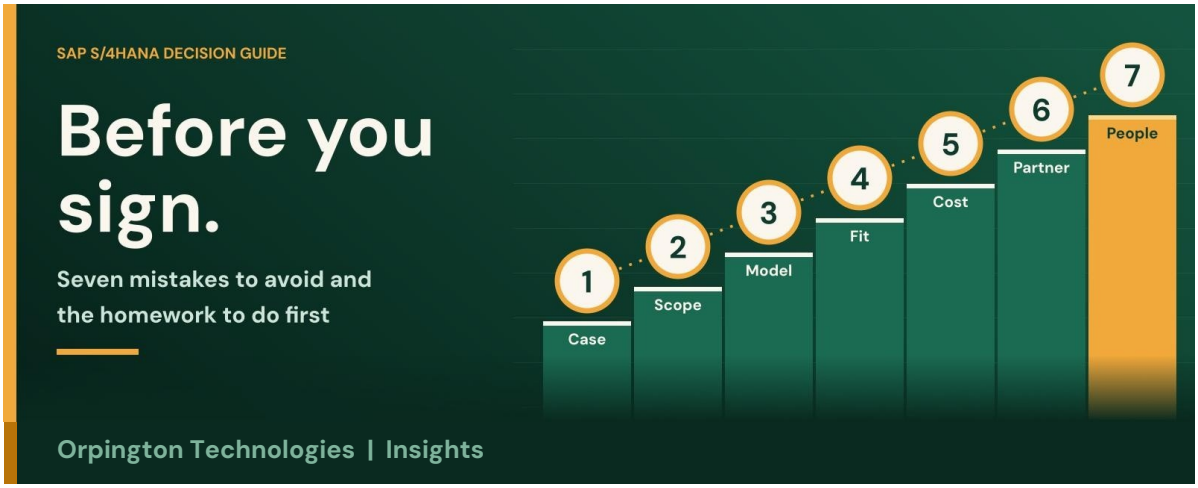
SAP S/4HANA DECISION GUIDE

Seven Mistakes to Avoid Before You Sign for S/4HANA, and the Homework to Do First

Most ERP projects are won or lost before the contract is signed. Seven decision mistakes recur, and each has homework that costs little now and a great deal more later.



An ERP decision reshapes how a company closes its books, ships orders and answers its auditors for the next decade. It is also one of the technology choices most often made badly. Gartner's Dixie John told The Register in November 2025 that about 70 percent of ERP initiatives fail to fully meet their original business case goals, and that about 25 percent fail catastrophically [1]. In The 2026 ERP Report from Panorama Consulting, as summarized by erp-software.org, 30 percent of projects ran over budget and almost a quarter exceeded the planned timeline [2].

Much of that outcome is settled before a contract is signed. The causes Gartner cites include weak business cases, unrealistic scope, conflicting stakeholders, customization tied to existing processes, limited change management and a lack of executive sponsorship, and a 2023 survey of 251 technology leaders found that 73 percent felt their ERP strategy was not strongly aligned with the business strategy [1]. This article is written for organizations choosing SAP S/4HANA as their ERP for the first time. It sets out seven mistakes that recur at the decision stage, and the homework that prevents each one.



Figure 1. How ERP projects end. Budget outcomes from Panorama Consulting's 2026 ERP Report and three Gartner findings [1][2].

1. Seven mistakes in the decision

Mistake 1: Buying without a measurable business case. UHY, an advisory and accounting firm, lists an undefined business case first among the pitfalls of selecting a new ERP [3]. Goals such as modernize finance or improve visibility cannot be tested on the day the system goes live. LeverX recommends writing goals as outcomes, for example cutting the month-end close from 10 days to 6, lifting inventory accuracy from 94 percent to 99 percent, or reducing manual order entry by 60 percent [4].

The homework: write five to seven outcomes of this kind, each with a baseline, a target and an owner, before any vendor is invited. Then classify every process as keep, improve, redesign or eliminate, so that the new system is not asked to reproduce work that should disappear, and rank requirements as must have, should have, nice to have or out of scope [4].

Mistake 2: Choosing the deployment model last. LeverX describes three ways to run S/4HANA. The public edition is software as a service managed by SAP, and suits organizations that can adopt standard processes, at the price of less flexibility. The private edition runs in a dedicated cloud with more flexibility, a recommended clean core, and customer control over upgrade timing within SAP's lifecycle, at the price of more governance. On-premise gives the broadest control, with the customer managing infrastructure and lifecycle [5]. RISE with SAP and GROW with SAP are commercial and transformation offerings, not technical deployment models, so the deployment decision comes first [5].

The homework: test the process list against each model. LeverX notes that fit depends on functional fit, integration feasibility and cost, not on company size [6]. In the public edition, two major upgrades arrive each year, generally in February and August, so the organization must be ready to absorb them [6].

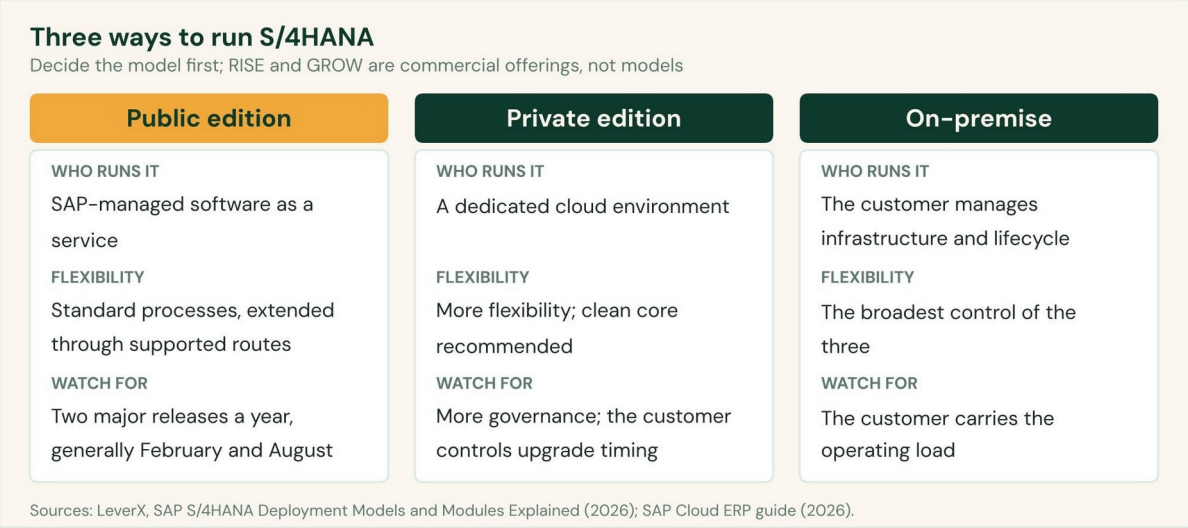


Figure 3. Three ways to run S/4HANA. A summary of LeverX's description of the deployment models and the public edition's release cycle [5][6].

Mistake 3: Letting vendor demos run the evaluation. UHY warns that uncontrolled demos reward the best presentation rather than the best fit, and advises scripted scenarios with weightings agreed before any demo takes place [3]. LeverX describes a funnel that narrows six to ten candidates to three to five and then two or three, with the same questions put to every candidate, pass or fail gates, and a weighted scorecard that scores the software and the implementation partner separately [4].

The homework: write the demo scripts from the outcomes in Mistake 1, using the organization's own scenarios and data, and agree the scorecard before the first session.

Table 1 shows the example weights LeverX gives [4]. The weights should be changed to reflect the business; the point is that they are fixed before the vendors are in the room.

Table 1. An example scorecard: weights to fix before the first demo

Criterion	Example weight	What to test
Functional fit	25%	The organization's own scripted scenarios, on its own data
Technical and integration	15%	Every connection mapped, with an owner for each
Implementation approach	15%	Partner method, named team and references
Total cost of ownership	15%	A five-year model, including exit
Security and compliance	10%	Local rules, audit needs and access design
Scalability	10%	Growth, new entities and new countries
Vendor viability	10%	Roadmap, references and contract terms

Mistake 4: Assuming the standard will fit. In the public cloud edition, unrestricted modifications to SAP standard code are not supported. Gaps are closed through three extensibility routes: key user tools, developer extensions in a three-system landscape, or side-by-side extensions on SAP Business Technology Platform [6]. Excessive customization appears among the reasons projects go over budget [7], and Gartner lists customization tied to existing processes among its causes of failure [1]. Keeping the core close to standard is, as LeverX summarizes the clean core principle, a governance rule rather than a ban on custom code [10].

The homework: use fit-to-standard, the method SAP describes for the explore phase of SAP Activate. It starts from the standard processes and asks how they fit, instead of starting from a blank blueprint. The workshops produce a backlog of fit and gap items, and each gap is resolved as an upcoming release, an existing extension, or a new extension plus integration [8]. SAP also offers a free 14-day trial of S/4HANA Cloud Public Edition, with predefined scenarios for sales, procurement, production, project management, finance and quality inspection on demo data. It can be extended for further 14-day periods, each of which creates a new trial account without the earlier data, and key user capabilities such as customization, master data management and integration with SAP Business Technology Platform are not offered [9]. The trial shows how the standard processes behave; it does not test the organization's own data or gaps, which is the job of the workshops.

Mistake 5: Pricing the licenses instead of the program. TechTarget identifies ten categories of hidden ERP cost: price increases when modules were left out of the first quote, poor product fit, integrations, customization, custom code maintenance, talent gaps, data work, lost productivity, resistance to change, and post-go-live spending, including subscription creep and usage-based charges. Poor product fit is the largest source of surprises [11]. Among over-budget projects in the Panorama research, the leading cause was technology that turned out to be needed and was not planned (Figure 2) [2].

The homework: build a five-year cost model before signing. UHY asks for implementation, integrations, hosting, support, upgrades and the cost of exit [3], and LeverX recommends a three to five year view [4]. Published list prices help to anchor it. As of October 2026, LeverX reports US prices of $295 per user per month for Finance Base and $403 for Finance Premium, with a minimum of 15 users on Base. Thirty Finance Base users would cost $8,850 a month, or $106,200 a year, before any implementation work [6].

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Mistake 6: Treating the software and the partner as one decision. UHY advises evaluating the implementation partner as rigorously as the software [3]. Staffing is a common failure point: among over-budget projects in the Panorama research, 35.3 percent said project staffing had been underestimated in the initial budget [2]. LeverX suggests reference checks that ask whether the customer would choose the same vendor and the same partner again, and a contract that settles pricing protection, scope, data rights, service levels and termination [4].

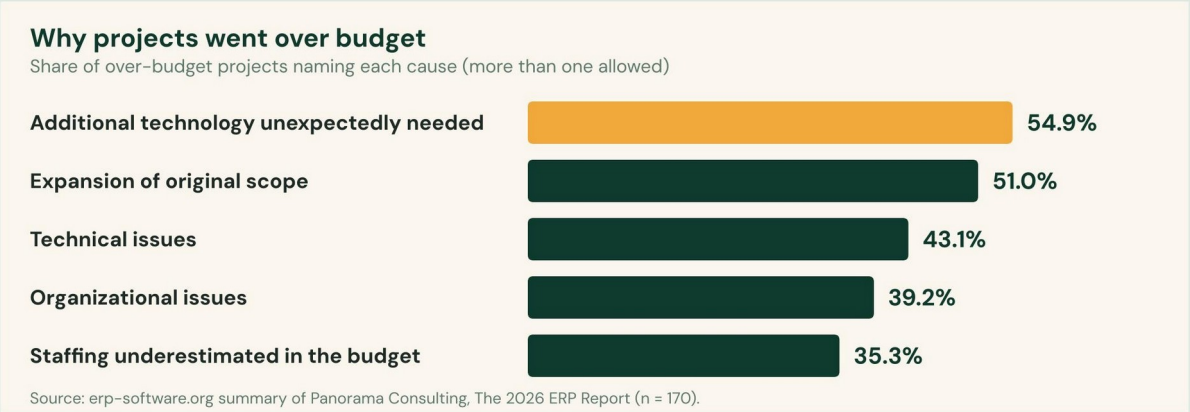


Figure 2. Why projects went over budget. Share of over-budget projects naming each cause in the Panorama research; respondents could name more than one [2].

The homework: score the partner on its own scorecard, speak to at least two references the partner did not choose for you, and read the draft contract for the items above before the shortlist is cut. A partner who cannot show who will actually do the work, and for how long, has not yet answered the question.

Mistake 7: Leaving people and governance for later. Panorama Consulting lists technology placed ahead of people, insufficient executive buy-in and insufficient end-user training among the causes of overruns, and warns that "neglecting organizational change management and viewing it merely as end-user training can lead to employee resistance" [7]. Gartner points to a lack of executive sponsorship and conflicting stakeholders [1], and UHY to weak governance and unclear decision rights [3]. In the Panorama research, delays were most often caused by organizational issues [2].

The homework: name an executive sponsor with the authority to settle disputes, write down who decides scope, and agree a steering group before the contract is signed. Budget for change management as its own line, separate from training, and for the backfill that frees key staff to work on the project.

2. The homework before you sign

LeverX offers a readiness checklist for the public cloud edition that covers eleven areas: business processes, readiness for artificial intelligence, critical gaps, localization, integrations, data, extensibility, security, organization, change readiness and the financial case. It ends in one of three outcomes: proceed, proceed conditionally, or evaluate another deployment model [6]. The same structure works for any edition, and Table 2 turns the seven mistakes into a sign-off list.

Time matters too. LeverX puts selection at two to four months for a small business, three to six for the mid-market and six to twelve or more for an enterprise [4]. Implementation then runs about five to seven months in a typical SAP Activate program, two to four months for GROW with a predefined scope, and twelve months or more for large transformations [6]. A decision rushed to save a month at the start is easy to pay for many times over at the end.

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Table 2. The seven mistakes at a glance

Mistake	Early warning sign	The homework
1. No business case	Goals read as slogans	Outcomes with baseline, target and owner
2. Model chosen last	Quotes arrive before the edition is settled	Test the process list against each model
3. Demo-led selection	Vendors set the agenda	Scripted scenarios and a scorecard fixed first
4. Fit assumed	Gaps first appear after signing	Fit-to-standard workshops and a trial
5. License pricing only	One line in the budget for software	Five-year cost model with exit
6. Partner an afterthought	Partner picked after the software	Separate scorecard, references, draft contract
7. People later	No named sponsor or decision rights	Sponsor, steering group, change budget

3. Where Orpington Technologies fits

The seven mistakes share a pattern. Each was visible before the contract was signed, and each needed someone who had seen it before. That gives a simple test for an advisor: afterward, could the client say the following? The statements are written in a client's voice. Each is followed by what Orpington Technologies publishes about how it works, so that the statement can be checked rather than taken on faith.

"The risks were on the table before we signed anything." Orpington's Free Confidence Diagnostic gives an instant self-reported score and the top three risk flags at no cost [13]. A business case, a deployment model or a partner choice is the kind of area where a flag is cheapest to act on.

"Every risk they raised came with evidence." The Full ERP Diagnostic Report checks the answers against evidence before a certified platform expert reviews them [13].

"The people reviewing our plan had done this before." Orpington describes its reviewers as certified SAP, Oracle, Dynamics 365, NetSuite and Odoo practitioners, and states that the work is not handled by junior staff working under a partner's rate card [13].

"The price held." Orpington describes its pricing as a fixed fee per stage, with no day rates and no open-ended retainers, and indicates that the fee is normally discussed before the work starts [13].

"Someone independent stayed accountable from selection to hypercare." Its Full ERP Implementation Partnership provides independent oversight from platform selection through hypercare [13]. Implementation Risk Remediation offers focused advisory sprints to close a known risk, and Stalled Implementation Recovery addresses scope creep, missed milestones and integrator disputes [13].

"When we needed hands, they arrived." Through **ERP staff augmentation**, a shortlist of three matched candidates arrives in roughly four weeks. Each bench consultant is credentialed by a certified practitioner, remains Orpington's employee, works remotely and takes direction from the client's project lead. A 90-day replacement guarantee is given in writing, and a single all-inclusive monthly invoice replaces payroll and benefits administration, with no percentage-of-salary commission [12]. Orpington's page puts the

typical cost of a direct hire at 1.25 to 1.4 times base salary and the search at 8 to 12 weeks [12].

For an organization still at the shortlist stage, the sensible first step is the free diagnostic. If it suggests that the plan is sound, it cost very little; if it raises a flag, the flag was found while there was still time to act on it. Orpington Technologies can be reached at https://www.orpingtontech.com/ or info@orpingtontech.com.

Sources & Further Reading

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