DEALCRAFT ADVISORY

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Starting Your ERP Journey: Greenfield, Bluefield or Brownfield?

How to choose the right path before you choose a vendor, and why the choice sets your cost, your risk and your timeline.

GREENFIELD
Start again on standard

BLUEFIELD
Keep what works, rebuild the rest

BROWNFIELD
Convert what you have

Written for CFOs, business owners and procurement teams.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The decision that comes before the decision

Most organisations start their ERP journey by asking which software to buy. The more important question comes first: how much of what you have today should you carry into the new system?

There are three broad answers. **Greenfield** means starting again on a new, largely standard system and moving only the data you need. **Brownfield** means converting your existing system, keeping its configuration, custom code and history. **Bluefield**, more formally called *selective data transition*, sits in between: you keep the parts that still work, rebuild the parts that don't and choose which data comes across.

That choice, more than the software brand, decides where the money goes, how much business change you take on, what history you keep and what you will be buying from your implementation partner. It also decides how the contract should be written.

15%

of SAP migrations studied by ISG were delivered on time and on budget. 58% were both late and over budget.

ISG, March 2026[5]

~6 in 10

SAP customers were still on ECC with no decision yet to move, according to Gartner in early 2025.

Gartner via The Register, Feb 2025[3]

End-2027

is when SAP mainstream maintenance for ECC ends. Optional extended maintenance runs to 2030 at extra cost.

SAP, Feb 2020[1]

WHAT EACH READER SHOULD TAKE AWAY

CFO
The approach decides the cost curve, when value arrives and how much tail risk you carry. Ask for a range, not a single number, and tie contingency to named risks.

Business owners
The approach decides how much your teams will change the way they work, and how much of their time the programme will need. It is a business decision, not an IT one.

Procurement
The approach decides what you are buying. Define it before you go to market, so suppliers price the same thing and the contract can hold them to it.

NOT ON SAP?

The same choice appears under other names: moving from Oracle E-Business Suite to Oracle Fusion is generally a re-implementation, while Microsoft offers Dynamics AX 2012 customers an upgrade path that carries history across.[16] The framework in this paper applies to any of them.

PART 1 · WHY NOW

A crowded market with a fixed deadline

For SAP customers the timetable is set. For everyone else, the lesson from SAP's market is the same: the organisations that decide early get better partners, better prices and more realistic plans.

The SAP timetable

DATE	WHAT HAPPENS
31 Dec 2027	Mainstream maintenance for SAP Business Suite 7 (ECC 6.0) ends.[1]
2028 to 2030	Optional extended maintenance, at a premium of two percentage points on the maintenance base. Customers who don't opt in move to customer-specific maintenance.[1]
2031 to 2033	A time-bound "transition option" for the largest customers, but only for systems moved to SAP ERP, private edition on SAP HANA **before the end of 2030**, with a minimum 2 TB size and the max success plan. Contracts signed in 2026 carry a 20% uplift. The uplift for later contracts has not been disclosed.[2]
2040	SAP's committed maintenance horizon for S/4HANA.[1]

The 2033 option is not a reprieve for organisations that wait: it requires a move to SAP's private cloud edition before the end of 2030.

Where the market is

Gartner estimated in early 2025 that over 60% of SAP customers remained on ECC with no decision yet to move, and that by 2030 four in ten of today's ECC customers will still use ECC in key business areas.[3] That is a lot of organisations competing for the same people in the same window.

On approach, surveys differ but tell a consistent story: no single path dominates. ASUG found 34% brownfield, 33% greenfield and 20% hybrid among its members in 2024.[6] ISG's 2026 study of 200 large organisations found 34% brownfield, 18% greenfield and nearly half mixing the two.[4]

THE EVIDENCE ON OVERRUNS

15% of SAP migrations ISG studied were on time and on budget. **58%** were both late and over budget.[5]

30% longer than planned, on average, in Horváth's survey of 200 SAP users. Budgets were exceeded in more than six in ten cases. Underestimated testing and data migration were among the causes.[7]

1 in 6 large IT projects becomes a "black swan", with an average cost overrun of 200%, in Oxford research across 1,471 projects.[9]

> *ISG found delays are most often caused by weak governance rather than technical challenges.[4] Many governance choices are made when you choose your approach.*

PART 2 · THE THREE APPROACHES

Greenfield, bluefield, brownfield

Each approach is a different answer to one question: how much of today do you carry into tomorrow? There is no universally right answer, only one that fits your processes, your data and your appetite for change.

	GREENFIELD	BLUEFIELD	BROWNFIELD
What it is	A new implementation, designed largely on standard processes ("fit-to-standard").[14]	A selective data transition: a new or "shell" system into which chosen configuration, code and data are moved with specialist tools.[14]	A system conversion: a guided technical conversion of the existing system, one to one.[14]
What you keep	Open items, balances and master data. History usually stays in an archive or a read-only legacy system.	What you choose: for example selected company codes, processes, custom code and years of history.	Almost everything: configuration, custom code, processes and full history.
What changes	Most processes, roles and reports. The biggest business change of the three.	The parts you choose to redesign. Change can be phased by process or entity.	The least on day one. Process improvement comes later, if it is planned and funded.
Where the effort goes	Design, process change, data clean-up and migration, training.	Analysis and design of what to keep, specialist transition tooling, testing.	Custom code remediation, technical conversion, testing.
Typical fit	Poor data, heavy outdated customisation, or a carve-out or new entity that cannot take the old system.	Several entities or ERPs to consolidate, a mix of good and poor processes, or history that must be kept selectively.	Processes that work well, custom code that is used and valuable, and a need to keep full history intact.
Main risk	Underestimating business change and the effort of data migration.	Complexity and dependence on scarce specialist tools and people.	Carrying technical debt forward and calling it transformation.

A NOTE ON THE WORD "BLUEFIELD"

"Bluefield" is a registered trademark of the software firm SNP, which pioneered the approach.[13] SAP's own term is **selective data transition**, and practitioners also call it hybrid. In a tender, use the neutral term and describe exactly what will be selected, so suppliers price the same thing.

TWO DECISIONS, NOT ONE

How you move (greenfield, bluefield or brownfield) is a separate decision from where the system runs (on-premise, private cloud or public cloud). Public cloud editions generally require a greenfield, standard-first approach, so the hosting decision can narrow your options. Make both decisions deliberately.

PART 3 · FOR THE CFO

Cost, value timing and risk

The three approaches don't just cost different amounts. They spend at different times, deliver value at different times and leave risk in different places.

	GREENFIELD	BLUEFIELD	BROWNFIELD
Cost profile	Highest one-off spend on design, change and data. Lower ongoing cost if the system stays close to standard.	Moderate, but specialist tooling and skills carry a premium. Cost depends heavily on how much is selected.	Often lowest upfront. A second spend usually follows to improve the processes the conversion carried over.
When value arrives	At and after go-live, if the redesigned processes are adopted.	Phased, entity by entity or process by process.	Mostly technical at first (supportability, platform). Business value depends on later phases.
Where risk sits	Adoption, data quality, scope growth during design.	Transition complexity, tool and specialist availability, testing.	Custom code volume, testing effort, and the risk that the business case stops at "we moved".
History and reporting	History moves to an archive or a read-only legacy system. Budget for it, and for the reports that read it.	Chosen history moves. The rest needs a retention solution.	All history carried forward, with the cost of storing and converting it.

Four things to ask of any ERP business case

1. **Show the range, not a single number.** Oxford research on 1,471 IT projects found an average cost overrun of 27%, and one in six became a "black swan" averaging 200%.[9] Show the likely range and what would push cost to the top of it.
2. **Tie contingency to named risks.** A flat percentage is the first thing cut in negotiation. Contingency attached to specific risks (data quality, custom code, availability of business people) survives, because everyone can see what it is for.
3. **Price the history.** Irish Revenue generally requires records to be kept for six years, and longer in some cases.[11] Whatever you don't migrate must stay retained, accessible and auditable, at a cost.
4. **Separate "moved" from "improved".** Gartner predicts that by 2027 more than 70% of recently implemented ERP initiatives will fail to fully meet their original business case goals.[10] List which benefits depend on process change, each with an owner and a date.

THE COST OF WAITING

Deferring is legitimate, but not free. Extended SAP maintenance costs more. Third-party support can cut fees but brings no new releases and rules out SAP's 2031–2033 option. Since 10 July 2026, SAP's commitments to the European Commission waive the reinstatement fee and cap back-maintenance for returning customers, so a temporary move is cheaper to reverse.[12] The migration still has to be paid for. Model deferral as a scenario with its own costs, not as a saving.

PART 4 · FOR BUSINESS OWNERS

Change, people and disruption

The approach decides how different Monday morning will feel after go-live, and how much of your best people's time the programme will need before it.

GREENFIELD

Most change, cleanest result

Teams learn new processes, new screens and often new roles. The opportunity is real: you can stop doing things that exist only because the old system needed them. The cost is that your process owners must make many design decisions quickly, and then lead their teams through the change.

BLUEFIELD

Change where it pays

You redesign the processes that hold you back and keep the ones that work. That needs a clear, early view of which is which, process by process. It also asks business owners to agree on where the line sits, which is often harder than it sounds.

BROWNFIELD

Least change on day one

Users see a new interface but largely the same processes. Disruption is lower, but so is the immediate improvement. The risk is that "we'll improve it later" never gets funded once the deadline pressure has gone.

What every path asks of the business

Named process owners with authority. Someone in each area who can decide how the process will work, and is given the time to do it, not someone fitting it around a full-time job.

Ownership of data. Data quality is a business problem before it is a technical one. In a 2025 UKISUG study, 79% of organisations said data management presents a challenge in moving from ECC to S/4HANA.[15] Decide who cleanses what, by when, before the contract is signed.

A view on what stops. New systems rarely fail because they can't do something new. They fail because the old spreadsheets, side systems and workarounds are never switched off.

Leadership using the new numbers. Adoption follows the reports leadership chooses to use. If the board pack still comes from a side model, everyone else will treat the ERP as optional.

> *The approach you choose should match the amount of change your organisation can absorb, not just the amount it would like to achieve.*

PART 5 · FOR PROCUREMENT

Decide what you are buying before you buy it

If the approach isn't decided before you go to market, each supplier proposes the one that suits its strengths, and you end up comparing prices for different things.

How the approach changes the tender

	GREENFIELD	BLUEFIELD	BROWNFIELD
Scope to define	Processes in scope, the target for standard adoption, data objects and volumes, legacy archive and retention.	Exactly what is selected: entities, processes, custom objects, years of history. The transition tooling and who licenses it.	Custom code inventory and the remediation rule (retire, fix, rebuild), interfaces, test cycles.
Ask suppliers to show	How they run fit-to-standard and change, using your scenarios.	Named specialists and tool experience on comparable transitions.	A custom code analysis method and evidence from conversions of similar size.
Commercial watch-outs	Scope growth during design. Fix the design-authority rules and the change mechanism.	Tool licences and specialist rates priced outside the main fee.	Remediation priced as a percentage, not per counted object.

Five clauses that protect the buyer on any path

1. **Counted scope.**
   Data objects, interfaces, custom objects, test cycles and training sessions, all with numbers. If a scope item has no number, it isn't yet a scope item.
2. **Client responsibilities with dates.**
   What your organisation must provide (people, decisions, cleansed data) and by when, so delays have a clear owner.
3. **Testable assumptions.**
   Each one specific, owned and stating what happens to price and plan if it proves false.
4. **A priced change mechanism.**
   Pre-agreed rates and a decision turnaround, so change is a transaction, not a dispute.
5. **Outcomes after go-live.**
   Hypercare exit criteria, and who owns improvement once the project team leaves.

FOR PUBLIC BODIES

In Ireland, Directive 2014/24/EU is given effect by S.I. No. 284 of 2016, which limits how far an existing contract can be modified. A migration bolted onto an incumbent integrator's contract may need its own procurement. Deciding the approach early helps you define the requirement and choose the right procedure. Take procurement and legal advice on your circumstances.

PART 6 · CHOOSING YOUR PATH

Ten questions that point to the right path

Answer these with facts, not opinions. Most can be answered with a few weeks of analysis, which is far cheaper than discovering the answers mid-programme.

1 **Do your core processes still fit how the business wants to work?**
Mostly yes: brownfield. Mostly no: greenfield. A mix: bluefield.

2 **How much of your custom code is actually used, and does it give you an advantage?**
Measure usage before you decide. Little used or easily replaced by standard: greenfield. Used and valuable: brownfield or bluefield.

3 **How good is your master and transactional data?**
Poor: greenfield or bluefield, with clean-up before migration. Good: any path.

4 **How much history must stay live in the new system, rather than in an archive?**
All of it: brownfield. Some: bluefield. Little: greenfield, with a retention solution.

5 **How many ERPs, entities or clients are you bringing together?**
One: any path. Several, with different quality: bluefield is often designed for this.

6 **How much change can the organisation absorb in the next two to three years?**
Limited: brownfield now, with a funded improvement phase. High: greenfield.

7 **What is your deadline exposure?**
Count back from your maintenance end date and your own business calendar (year-ends, peaks, other programmes). Tight deadlines narrow options; they don't remove the need to choose.

8 **How many interfaces and adjacent systems depend on the ERP?**
Many: scope, test and price them explicitly whatever the path. They are a common source of overruns.

9 **Where do you want the system to run?**
Public cloud generally means greenfield and standard-first. Private cloud and on-premise keep all three paths open.

10 **What does each path cost over five years, not just to go live?**
Include later improvement phases, archiving, specialist tools, extended maintenance and the cost of business people's time.

Reading the answers. If most answers lean one way, you have your starting position. If they are split, that is not indecision: it is often the clearest signal that a selective, bluefield approach deserves a serious look. Either way, write the reasons down. A decision with stated reasons can be defended to a board, tested by suppliers and revisited if the facts change.

PART 7 · TRAPS AND FIRST STEPS

What goes wrong, and a 90-day plan

GREENFIELD TRAPS

- Treating "standard" as free: every exception becomes a design debate.
- Forgetting history: the archive and its reports are not budgeted.
- Under-sizing training and change because the software "is intuitive".

BLUEFIELD TRAPS

- Selecting too much, which recreates brownfield at greater cost.
- Depending on a few specialists or one tool without a fallback.
- Leaving the "what to keep" decision to the technical team alone.

BROWNFIELD TRAPS

- Carrying unused custom code forward and paying to fix it.
- Under-pricing testing: conversion is mostly a testing programme.
- No funded plan for the process improvement that was promised.

A 90-day plan before you go to market

WHEN	WHAT TO DO	WHAT YOU HAVE AT THE END
Days 1–30 Facts	Analyse custom code usage, profile data quality, list processes, interfaces and adjacent systems, and confirm retention rules for history.	A fact base that suppliers and the board can't argue with.
Days 31–60 Options	Assess greenfield, bluefield and brownfield against the ten questions. Build a five-year cost range for each, including deferral as a scenario.	A recommended approach with written reasons, and the risks that come with it.
Days 61–90 Market	Turn the decision into counted scope, client responsibilities, evaluation criteria and the commercial model. Choose the procurement route.	A tender that every supplier will price the same way, and a contract you can hold them to.

CHECKLIST

Twelve questions to ask before you sign

Whichever path you choose, these are the questions that decide whether the contract will hold when reality differs from the plan. Print this page and take it into the final negotiation.

	QUESTION	YES	PARTLY	NO
1	Is the approach stated in the contract, with what is kept and what is left?	☐	☐	☐
2	Is every scope item counted?	☐	☐	☐
3	Is custom code remediation priced per object, with a rule for each?	☐	☐	☐
4	Who cleanses data, to what standard, by when?	☐	☐	☐
5	Where will history live, and how will it be reported on?	☐	☐	☐
6	How many test cycles, and who writes and runs the scripts?	☐	☐	☐
7	Which client people are committed, for how many days a week?	☐	☐	☐
8	Who has design authority, and how fast must decisions be made?	☐	☐	☐
9	Is contingency tied to named risks?	☐	☐	☐
10	Are change rates and turnaround agreed?	☐	☐	☐
11	What are the hypercare exit criteria?	☐	☐	☐
12	Who owns improvement after go-live, and is it funded?	☐	☐	☐

How to use it. Every "Partly" or "No" is a risk you are accepting. Either close it before signature, or name it, price it and give it an owner in the contract. That is what turns a list of worries into contingency the CFO can defend.

SOURCES

Notes and sources

Figures are quoted as published by each source, at the date shown. Survey samples, regions and definitions differ, so compare them with care. This paper is general guidance, not legal, tax or financial advice.

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ABOUT DEALCRAFT ADVISORY

Independent help on both sides of the ERP table

We help organisations buying ERP to define what they need and run a tender that suppliers price the same way, and we help system integrators win the bids that matter.

With 30+ years of SAP and enterprise deal experience across Europe, the Middle East and Latin America, we know how ERP deals are shaped, priced and won, and where delivery problems are written in before anyone starts.

For organisations starting an ERP journey, our buy-side tender support covers the approach decision, the requirement, the evaluation model and the contract essentials, scoped as a fixed-fee project per stage.

The first conversation is free. Book a discovery call at **dealcraftadvisory.ie** or email **sales@dealcraftadvisory.ie**.

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