protiviti®

Global Business Consulting

The Strategic Shift from SAP ECC to S/4HANA Private Cloud

Face the Future with Confidence®

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Introduction

2027 isn't just a deadline, it's a turning point. As ECC nears the end of its lifecycle, enterprises have a unique window to transform their digital core, embrace intelligent automation, and eliminate the legacy constraints that slow growth.

SAP S/4HANA Private Cloud offers the speed of the cloud with the control of on-premise, making it the strategic choice for organizations that aim to lead rather than adapt.

This paper outlines **the business case, roadmap, and strategic decisions** leaders must make to transition successfully and accelerate their path to an intelligent enterprise.

Executive Summary

Many organisations still rely on SAP ECC, even though SAP has confirmed that mainstream maintenance for ECC will end in 2027, with only more expensive extended support options available beyond that point. At the same time, the global shift towards cloud-based ERP is accelerating, with estimates suggesting that the cloud ERP market will more than 2x in value over this decade as organisations look for more flexible, AI-enabled platforms to run their businesses.

This paper explains, in practical terms, what the ECC deadline really means, why many organisations are choosing SAP S/4HANA Private Cloud as their next step, and how to approach the journey in a structured way.

1.

The Changing Enterprise Landscape

Today's organizations face a complex mix of pressures that demand a modernized digital core. We are seeing a confluence of forces:

Evolving Business Models

These require **real-time decision-making, automation, and flexibility** to capture new markets and manage complex value chains.

Increased Risk & Compliance

Mandates require robust traceability, integrated financial controls, and transparency throughout the enterprise.

Rising Digital Expectations

In today's market, providing a frictionless, connected experience for customers and partners is no longer a technical luxury—it is a strategic necessity. True competitive advantage now depends on the seamless orchestration of systems to meet rising digital expectations.

The S/4HANA Advantage

Powered by SAP HANA, S/4HANA delivers a simplified, real-time digital core that integrates finance, supply chain, procurement, and manufacturing enabling faster insights, tighter control, and scalable transformation. The Private Cloud Edition (PCE), delivered through the RISE with SAP program, offers optimal balance: the agility of cloud with the flexibility and control of an on-premise system.

Limitations of Legacy ECC

Traditional ECC landscapes increasingly constrain growth. High upgrade costs, diminishing legacy skill availability, and performance bottlenecks limit agility and slow decision-making.

2.

Why S/4HANA Private Cloud is the Optimal Choice

For organisations operating on SAP ECC, transitioning to S/4HANA is no longer just about upgrading systems, it's a fundamental business choice. SAP S/4HANA Private Cloud delivers a seamless digital upgrade that protects your existing investments and unique market edge while ensuring zero operational downtime. It combines the control enterprises expect from on-premise environments with the innovation velocity and resilience of the cloud, making it the preferred choice for risk-aware, value-driven transformation.

01 Strategic Control with Built-In Innovation

S/4HANA Private Cloud allows enterprises to retain full functional parity with ECC while transitioning to an SAP-managed cloud environment. Business-critical customisations and partner solutions that drive differentiation can be retained, eliminating avoidable disruption or rework. At the same time, SAP-managed upgrades keep the environment continuously up to date, allowing organisations to adopt new capabilities without taking on the complexity of ongoing technical maintenance. Therefore, it ensures you can evolve your business without ever compromising the stability your daily operations depend on.

02 Predictable Costs and Simplified Operations

The Private Cloud model offloads the burden of IT maintenance to SAP, turning complex operations into a streamlined, hands-off service. This shift moves organisations away from large, upfront capital spend to a predictable subscription-led operating model, giving leadership clearer cost visibility and stronger financial control. Built-in enterprise-grade standards for security, performance, and availability reduce operational overhead, while flexible scalability allows the platform to grow with the business whether through expansion, acquisitions, or changing demand. Together, this lowers operational risk and delivers a significantly more efficient total cost of ownership.

03   An Intelligent Core for Continuous Value Creation

S/4HANA Private Cloud is designed to serve as an intelligent digital backbone for the enterprise. Embedded analytics, automation, and AI capabilities enable faster decision-making, improved productivity, and more resilient operations across functions. Through native integration with SAP Business Technology Platform, organizations can extend and innovate beyond the core—building custom applications, automating workflows, and integrating best-of-breed solutions—without compromising system integrity. This ensures the ERP evolves continuously in line with business strategy, rather than becoming a constraint.

04   Resilience, Security, and Trust by Design

Running S/4HANA on SAP's managed cloud provides a level of resilience that is both complex and expensive to achieve in traditional setups. Capabilities such as high availability, disaster recovery, and data protection are built in from day one, rather than delivered through bespoke initiatives. With built-in security and continuous monitoring, leaders can trust their digital core is protected, freeing them to focus entirely on driving business value. This gives leaders the peace of mind that their digital foundation is secure, allowing them to stop worrying about cyber risks and start focusing on growth and long-term strategy.

3. Transformation Strategy: Greenfield vs. Brownfield

The initial and most critical decision in the S/4HANA journey is determining the right implementation approach.

Dimension	Greenfield (New Implementation)	Brownfield (System Conversion)
Definition	Re-implementation of SAP S/4HANA from scratch, focusing on standard processes.	Technical and functional conversion of the existing ECC system to S/4HANA.
When to Choose	When current business processes are outdated, heavily customized, or require a full redesign.	When existing ECC processes are stable, optimized, and valuable enough to retain.
Advantages	Provides a clean slate with a **fit-to-standard** design.	Lower disruption to users and existing integrations.
	Opportunity to simplify and harmonize global processes.	Faster transition with less change management effort.
	Enables immediate adoption of SAP best practices and innovations.	Retains proven business processes and data continuity.
Challenges	Requires full data migration and extensive testing.	May carry forward legacy inefficiencies and technical debt.
	Larger upfront organizational change management effort.	Limited scope for radical business process redesign.
Time-to-Value	Moderate (typically 6 – 12 months for mid-size organizations).	Shorter (typically 4 – 8 months, depending on system size and complexity).
Innovation Readiness	Future-ready with a clean core and extensibility built on BTP from Day 1.	Can adopt innovations incrementally post go-live, focusing first on technical migration.

Hybrid Approach (Bluefield)

Some organizations opt for a hybrid strategy—often called **Bluefield**—which uses selective data transition or a phased, module-by-module adoption. This approach balances the transformational agility of Greenfield with the continuity and speed of Brownfield.
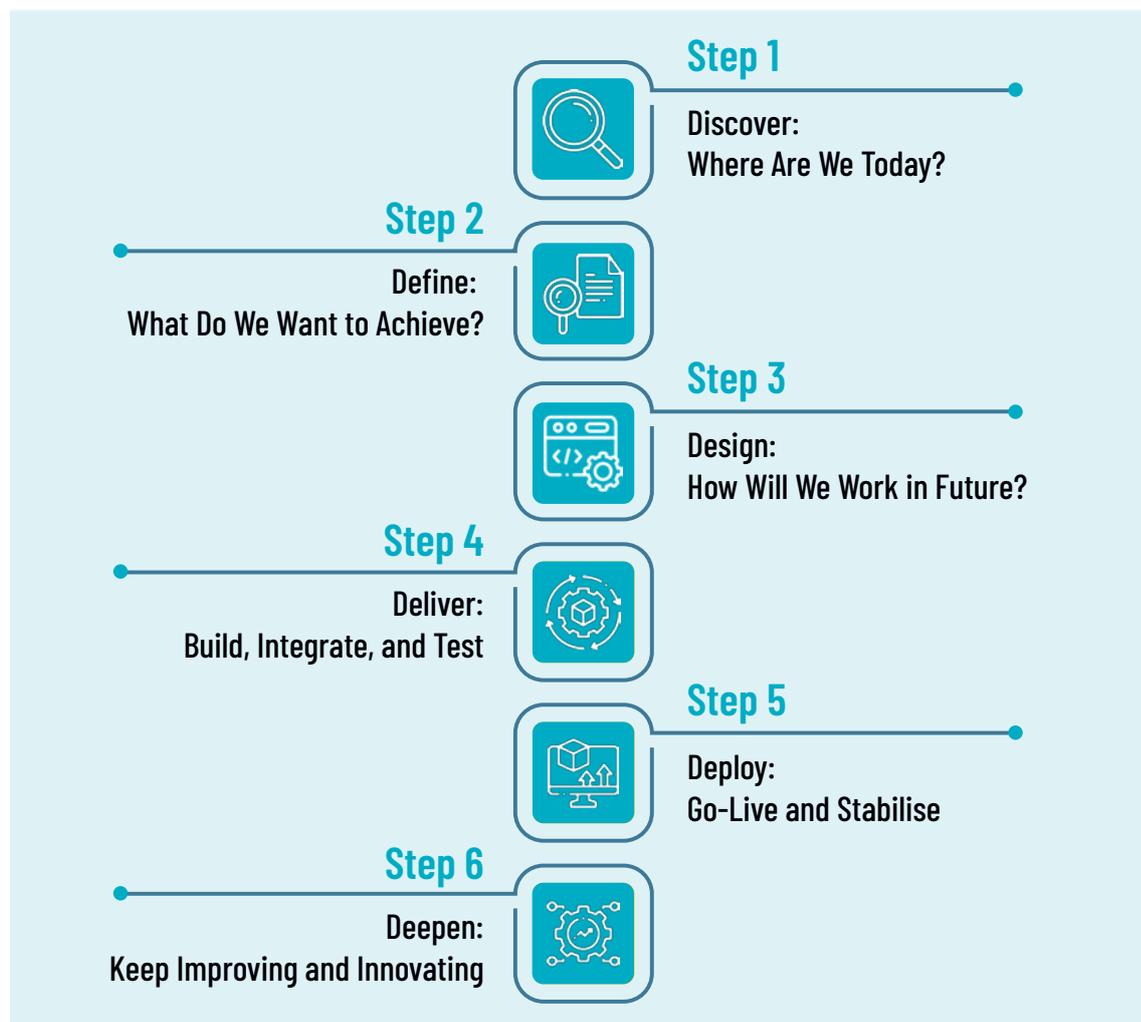
4.

The Business Case: Transformation Beyond IT

S/4HANA Private Cloud is more than a technical upgrade, it's a powerful investment in your company's future growth and agility

A Simple, Six-Step Framework for the Journey

We've simplified the move to S/4HANA by turning a complex migration into a clear, step-by-step roadmap. The following six-step framework translates common good practices from successful programmes into language that business leaders can quickly grasp.

Step 1

Discover:
Where Are We Today?

Step 2

Define:
What Do We Want to Achieve?

Step 3

Design:
How Will We Work in Future?

Step 4

Deliver:
Build, Integrate, and Test

Step 5

Deploy:
Go-Live and Stabilise

Step 6

Deepen:
Keep Improving and Innovating

Step 1 – Discover: Where Are We Today?

The first step is to take an honest look at the current ECC environment, including customisations, data quality, process deviations, and technical health. By using tools like SAP Readiness Check and Process Discovery, leaders get a clear, data-backed view of their risks and opportunities, providing a solid foundation for every decision.

Step 3 – Design: How Will We Work in Future?

In this step, teams map how work should flow in the future, using S/4HANA standard processes as the default and only adding variations where they clearly support business value or regulatory needs. Data governance is defined – who owns which data, how it is kept clean, and how it is controlled – as poor data is a major inhibitor in ERP projects according to many migration case studies and advisory publications.

Step 5 – Deploy: Go-Live and Stabilise

Once the system goes live, there is usually a period of "hypercare" where issues are monitored and resolved quickly, and users get extra support. Clear communication, role-based training, and rapid feedback loops help avoid frustration and ensure that people use the new tools in the way they were intended.

Step 2 – Define: What Do We Want to Achieve?

In this phase, leadership and process owners define clear wins: accelerating financial closes, gaining real-time cash visibility, automating approvals, and simplifying compliance. Relevant KPIs might include reducing days to close, increasing the share of touchless transactions, or lowering the number of custom developments that need to be supported.

Step 4 – Deliver: Build, Integrate, and Test

Technical teams configure S/4HANA, set up integrations (ideally via an API-first approach on SAP BTP), and migrate data from ECC, while business teams focus on making sure key scenarios work end-to-end. Strong testing – especially around financial reconciliations – is essential to give Boards and auditors confidence that the new system is reliable from day one.

Step 6 – Deepen: Keep Improving and Innovating

After stabilisation, organisations can turn their focus to continuous improvement, using tools like SAP Signavio and embedded analytics to spot bottlenecks, errors, or manual hotspots. Over time, they can introduce more advanced capabilities such as predictive forecasting, anomaly detection, and robotics to further improve productivity, in line with broader evidence that deeper digitalisation supports long-run productivity gains.

5. Key Considerations for Sustained Success

01 Embrace the Clean Core Philosophy:

Instead of dragging old, custom ECC code into your new system, stick to standard processes and build unique features as external extensions on SAP BTP. This keeps your digital core simple and stable, ensuring you can plug in new innovations and complete future upgrades without breaking your operations.

02 Prioritize High-Quality Data:

Accurate data is the bedrock of reliable automation and analytics. Start cleaning and organizing your data early in the project to ensure it is audit-ready and trustworthy.

03 Build a Connected Ecosystem:

Use an "API-first" approach through SAP BTP to link your ERP with banks, suppliers, and customers. This ensures your business processes flow smoothly across all external systems.

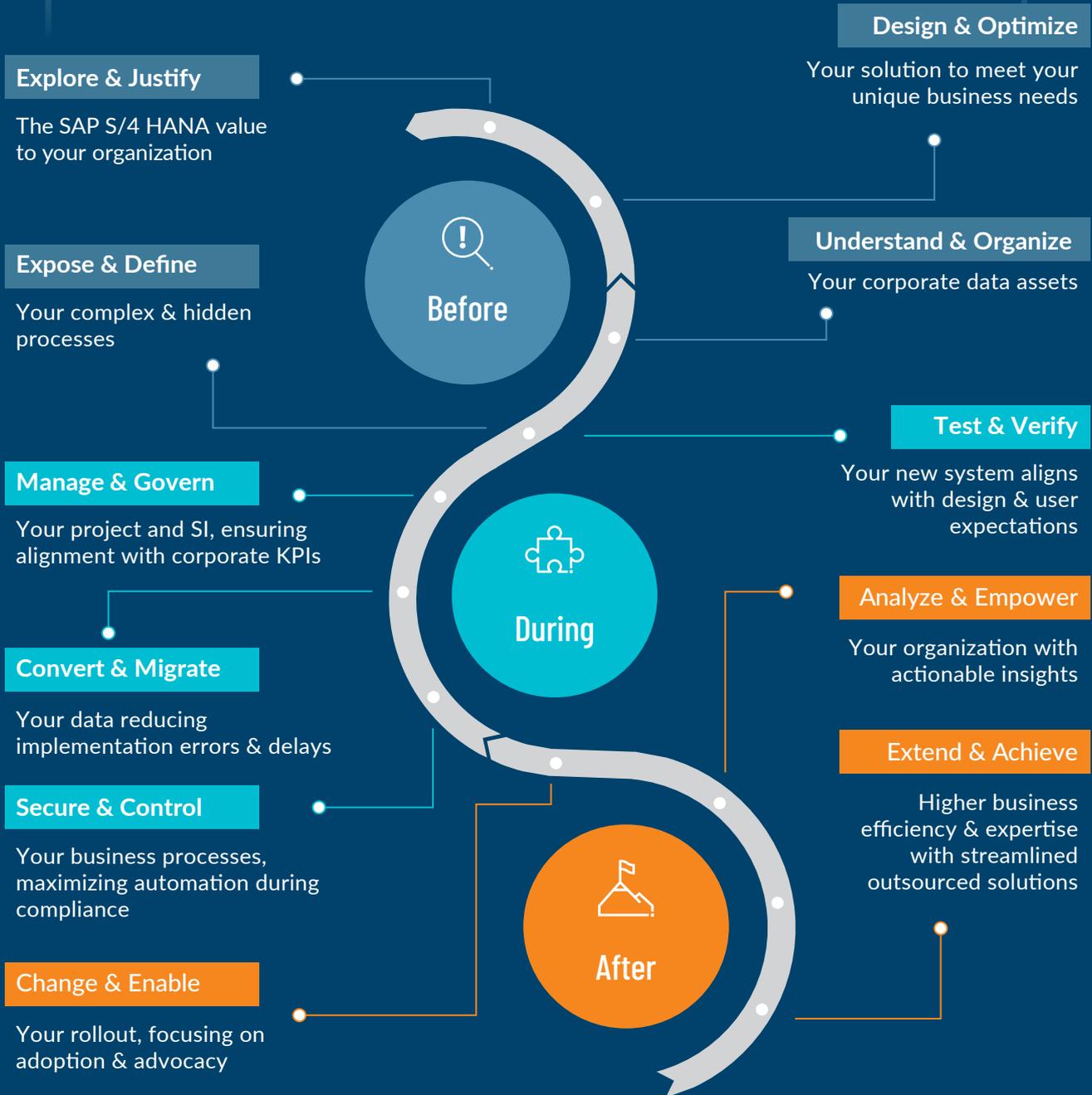## 04 Secure Strong Leadership and Support:

Real change must be led from the top. Active executive sponsors clear away obstacles, while empowered process owners and a disciplined PMO keep the project on schedule and aligned with business goals.

05 Follow a Proven Roadmap:

Use a structured, step-by-step guide like Protiviti's 10-step roadmap to manage risks and capture the highest possible value throughout every phase of the journey.

Navigate Your SAP S/4 HANA Journey with Confidence

Our Roadmap

Explore & Justify
The SAP S/4 HANA value to your organization

Expose & Define
Your complex & hidden processes

Manage & Govern
Your project and SI, ensuring alignment with corporate KPIs

Convert & Migrate
Your data reducing implementation errors & delays

Secure & Control
Your business processes, maximizing automation during compliance

Change & Enable
Your rollout, focusing on adoption & advocacy

Before

During

After

Design & Optimize
Your solution to meet your unique business needs

Understand & Organize
Your corporate data assets

Test & Verify
Your new system aligns with design & user expectations

Analyze & Empower
Your organization with actionable insights

Extend & Achieve
Higher business efficiency & expertise with streamlined outsourced solutions

6. Conclusion: The Journey to an Intelligent Enterprise

Moving from SAP ECC to S/4HANA Private Cloud is more than a technical upgrade; it is a strategic shift driven by the 2027 deadline and the urgent need for business agility. The Success will depend on choosing the right migration path, cleaning your data early, and keeping your digital core "clean" by using extensions rather than custom code. This transformation builds a scalable, intelligent foundation that allows your business to innovate and grow even in unpredictable markets. To fully realize this potential, the project must be backed by strong leadership, a disciplined roadmap, and a commitment to long-term value.

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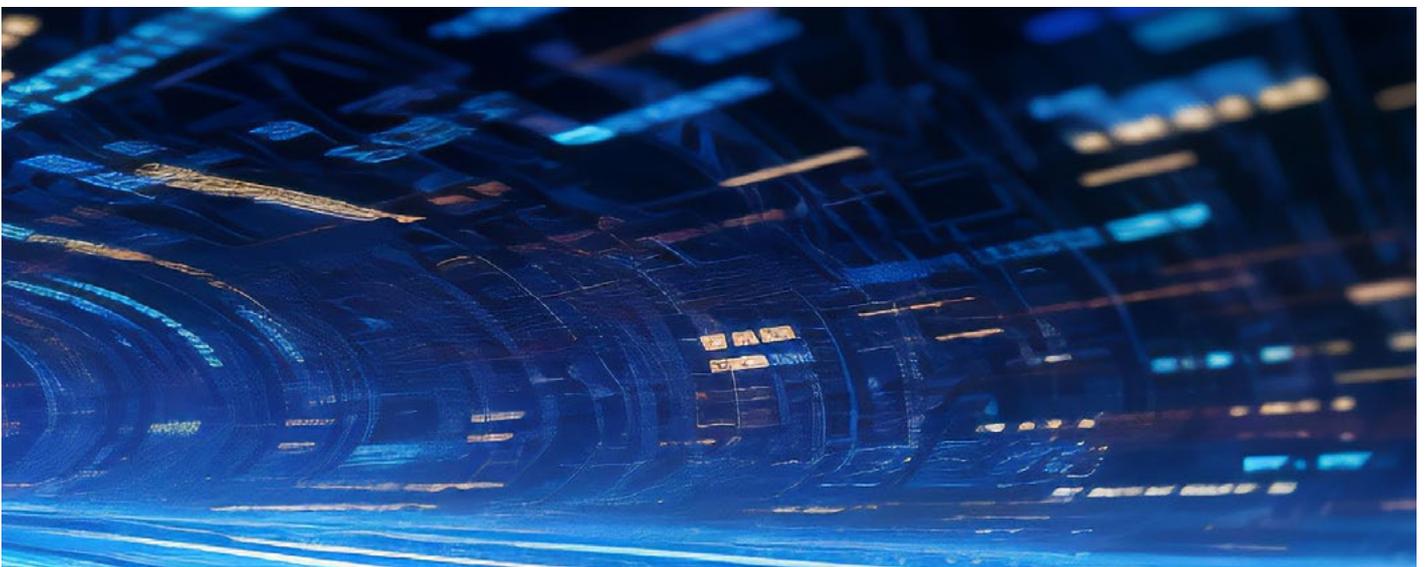
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