CHAPTER 22

A Day in the Life of an SAP Project Manager

Well, you've donned the hat of managing the most complex SAP implementation project. Now what? It is time to set the ground rules and execution strategy, and pull the team together to assess its strengths. There are a few key rules that you'll need to follow in this complex SAP landscape, as it demands technical, functional, and business process expertise and a 360-degree view of the software package.

Let's explore some of the common challenges faced by an SAP project manager during implementation projects. This chapter guides you through some of the common pitfalls to avoid—such as a lack of robust project management methodology, a lack of a communication plan, and lack of reporting—which can lead to a failed implementation. A project manager is a leader who drives people, processes, and technology to succeed in the endeavor.

Note SAP project management is the art of transforming the impossible into the possible, by helping clients succeed in their endeavors. With the tools, accelerators, and methods provided by SAP, there is no room for errors. If you follow the simple rules of the game with due diligence, right actions, and product support, your implementations will succeed. The SAP ERP package software can work well if done right, or can become maligned with too many customizations and integration issues if not following the basic principles. Success or failure depends on the project manager, who leads the team from the front.

Life of a SAP Project Manager

The SAP project manager is the key person responsible for driving a successful implementation. Undoubtedly, the PM is the captain who can successfully navigate the ship to the shore. As an SAP PM, you're responsible for managing the key processes, people, and technology, while also managing the scope, budget, and schedule.

The following ASAP methodology is a standard SAP method for implementing projects. As a PM, you'll be responsible for setting up the ground rules of using templates, delivery guidelines, and metrics to demonstrate success in every milestone achieved. Let's look at a day in the life a PM by analyzing every phase of SAP methodology and how you'd manage it diligently. Above all, the implementation expertise that you provide to the customer as a solution architect and trusted advisor is the most critical element. Often PMs are considered merely administrative leads, which is not true when managing SAP implementation projects. A PM is a trusted advisor who understands the 360-degree view of the product and takes necessary corrective actions to reach project goals that help customers achieve a successful implementation using the ASAP methodology.

Let's review how a project manager spends time in the following ASAP phases:

1. Project preparation
2. Blueprint
3. Realization
4. Final preparation
5. Go Live support
6. Operation

PMs spend most of their time in meetings, which have to be crisp and to the point with action items. Instead a PM should spend more time on solution design, evolution, and implementation planning, as execution can follow. If you're working with offshore team in a global delivery model, for example, ensure that the right metrics are in place—such as cost performance index (CPI) and schedule performance index (SPI)—to measure the quality of deliverables and timeliness, because often offshore delivery centers are a black box and not perceived by the client. The on-site project manager has the additional responsibility of ensuring that offshore work packages are shipped on time, with high quality, and measured as part of the overall project performance. This can be achieved only through process rigor, quality metrics, and KPIs defined for the overall project, including the offshore component. The handoff between on-site/offshore should be planned on a daily basis to ensure close communication between on-site/offshore teams. This is essential to evaluate risks, monitor progress, and control and mitigate steps through the project phases. On-site and offshore PMs have different responsibilities: for example, an on-site PM might be responsible for managing key stakeholders at the client site; meeting business SMEs; overseeing the project scope, schedule, and budget; and reviewing the solution design and status reports on a daily basis; whereas an offshore PM might be responsible for deliverables such as quality, overseeing meeting scope, and appraising an internal committee of the delivery organization. Today, most delivery organizations are global, so it is imperative to understand the roles of an on-site or offshore project manager, who is pivotal in driving a successful implementation project. As more and more projects are aligned to the global delivery model, it is imperative that PMs understand this model and its global delivery tasks. Let's take a look at the foundation of global delivery management, outlined in Table 22-1.

Table 22-1. *Global Delivery Management*

PM Phase	Purpose	Global Delivery Tasks
Initiating	Define objectives of the project. Evaluate costs, benefits, and approach.	Define project. Evaluate ROI and total cost of outsourcing. Engage global delivery with on-site/offshore SMEs.
Planning	Determine how projects will be delivered, and plan all aspects of the project, including detailed WBS.	Evaluate and modify knowledge acquisition and KT templates, and team and project charter. Define scope, budget, and schedule with risks baseline.
Executing	Plan the work, with assurance of high-quality deliverables.	Establish SLAs and WBS task execution, and monitor with metrics that measure the agreed-upon scope of work delivered.
Controlling	Continuously measure project performance to determine variance against the plan.	Use delivery dashboards, earned value management (EVM), and balance scorecard with toll gates.
Closing	Final handover with metrics, reports, sign-off from stakeholders, and archive project deliverables.	Sign off project, validate SLAs, confirm deliverables, and confirm customer acceptance.

What is more important is that most corporate IT departments do not operate at Capability Maturity Model (CMM) level 5. As a PM, you must ensure compliance in order for your implementation projects to succeed. On average, companies that are less mature in PM KPIs miss scheduled targets by 40%, and the cost of implementing SAP projects increases by 15–20% in less mature organizations. In a global delivery model, it is important to leverage standard tools, accelerators, and methods to consistently deliver projects successfully. The advantages of using a global delivery model include help in accessing SMEs across the globe, in offshore centers at locations such as India, China, and Buenos Aires. This model provides an opportunity to leverage the benefits of local delivery combined with global experience. One of the companies that I've worked with, Big Blue, pioneered the art of managing projects through global delivery centers located near the client or offshore-centric delivery, delivering consistently by utilizing a factory-mode approach. A global delivery manager should understand the challenges of working in different places and be sensitive to various cultures; work allocation in countries such as Japan is different from that in the United States. . In a conservative society such as in the MENA region, a lot of sensitivity is required while dealing with clients and global delivery employees; you need to be especially aware of work schedules and religious sentiments. Each of these aspects can help you succeed as a global delivery manager.

Typically, an on-site SAP project manager's calendar is filled as follows:

- Discussions with client stakeholders— 10%%
- High-level solution review and design—PMs should emphasize the solution for business-critical scenarios to prioritize to deliver a robust product – 15%.
- Detailed review discussions with the client business process SMEs—10%
- Daily status reviews, dashboards, and discussions with client stakeholders to review the plan. Brainstorming sessions with the team, evolving technical discussions such as architecture planning—10%
- Consolidating responses to the client— 5%
- Planning ahead, building rapport with SMEs, risk mitigation, project plan activities such as initiation, monitoring activities, quality management, administrative tasks, efforts burn ratio (contribution margin), budgetary issues, timelines, plans, status reporting—25%
- Spending time with the key SMEs across the organization, socializing with the key stakeholders to understand the political environment—5%
- Team building, motivating, and setting up KPIs for the team—5%
- Managing client escalations with corrective actions and socializing with the client project managers and business leads – 5%
- Managing change requests (CRs) and scope negotiations from time to time- 5%
- Handling conflicts within teams and with the client – 5%

Responsibilities of an offshore PM include the following:

- Solution design, development, and review, jointly with on-site PM
- Administrative responsibilities such as hiring new resources, training, on-boarding resources, mentoring, seat and asset allocation
- Delivering product as per defined standards
- Conducting interviews, team appraisal, performance review

- Delivery guidelines, development of code, testing, quality gate reviews
- Liaison with internal center of excellence (CoE) teams to ensure high-quality product delivery
- Use of delivery accelerators (tools, methods), metrics finalization, and standards as per customer requirements
- Collecting project metrics, monitoring success of achieving milestones
- Supporting on-site PM to monitor scope, schedule, and budget
- Delivery dashboards for reporting to the internal committee and external client stakeholders

SAP Project Manager Activities

To drive successful projects, you must modularize work packages in simple, measurable work units. A detailed WBS at the task level with measurement criteria is critical for a successful implementation. A project manager's job is to deliver the project within the various constraints that have been agreed upon. As a critical step in implementing projects, you should understand the proposed technical solution, overall implementation plan and implementation approach and discuss these with the client to gain consensus. In the preparation phase, the project manager sets up the project framework. Most important, in a global delivery (GD) model, you should network with different groups and COEs to collaborate effectively, as often the advantage of the GD model is knowledge across the board to support projects' success. Because SAP implementations are skill based, there is no time for training; hence the COEs come in handy in supporting your project implementations. Another advantage is to support projects with SMEs in niche areas of implementation, such as SAP transport management, Fiori, or HANA implementation projects. These SMEs can guide the rest of the team to succeed in the project implementation. You should liaise with SAP Active Global Support (AGS) to leverage their expertise, align with SAP's product strategy such as the cloud, HANA, or enterprise mobility and remain nimble in aligning your organizational strategy with SAP's product evolution.

The project manager considers the high-level goals for the project and what must be achieved. What are the key critical success factors? Project management tasks are intense during the initial stages, to set up the guidelines and the process. Once the framework is set up, the PM's focus is on monitoring and completion. The PM's responsibilities will increase during the final preparations and Go Live stage to ensure successful implementation of the project. A few essential competencies are required for a global delivery manager, as described in Table 22-2.

Table 22-2. *Essential Global Delivery Competencies*

Core Group	Global Competencies
Human Resources	Team building Rewards and recognition
KPIs	Define, track, measure, and improve KPIs. Collaborate with respective teams and service providers to resolve escalating issues.
Effective Decision Making	Understand the individual, team, and corporate dynamic; Determining key stakeholders to effectively resolve key issues.
Management	Ensure SLA adherence, establish processes and procedures to manage service levels.
Cognitive	Analytical thinking, collaborate with supplier to improve global delivery effectiveness.
Organizational Effectiveness	Flexibility, cultural awareness.

Now, let's look at the ASAP phases and key responsibilities of a PM.

Project Preparation

Project preparation is the initiation stage of a project. This stage includes setting required project goals, creating a team, and determining infrastructure requirements. Typically, a PM spends a lot of time in supporting administrative tasks such as interviewing the "A" team; requesting infrastructure setup, tools, and accelerators for connectivity; system access; and environment for development. Let's review key tasks accomplished during the project preparation phase:

- High-level business requirements completed
- Ensure that a high-level project plan is done with WBS breakup of tasks
- Workshop calendar—To plan your daily and weekly activities with the business SMEs, as client organizations are highly process oriented, and to publish the relevant topics to discuss with the client and ensure that you stick to the plan.
- Timely status—Agree on a standard status format, such as daily, weekly, and monthly reporting. Also ensure one-on-one discussions with the respective managers to avoid any gaps. Include all stakeholders to the plan, to keep them informed.
- Communication plan—Pay attention to on-site/offshore communication planning.
- Access requirements such as network connectivity to the offshore VPN, SAP system access, security and security soft tokens, and access to the remote desktops (RDP), as often remote connectivity takes longer. Also, onboarding formalities, space requirements, and workstations should be planned in advance to avoid delays in the deliverables.
- Assess required tools to implement for effectively managing the project, such as Microsoft Project plan, SAP Solution Manager to monitor status of the respective tasks by date.
- Finally, ensure that metrics are planned to measure the success rate of deliverables.

Blueprint

The blueprint is the most critical part of the project. Half of your problems will be solved, if you can define the solution, mapping the client's most critical business process. In my view, most teams rely on a sales pitch, rather than the real solution. Every niche area of implementation, such as enterprise mobility, must be done in a proof-of-concept (POC), to uncover most hidden risks in the project. The entire plan must be based on the POC done in a sandbox environment. This would set realistic goals that are simple, measurable, and achievable as you drive through the lanes of the realization phases. You can reevaluate the baseline estimates, schedule, and scope to set realistic goals:

- Business blueprint completed. You've understood most critical business scenarios and defined a solution in SAP. Well done.
- Ensure that business requirements are captured and validated with the respective SMEs.
- A detailed process overview discussion is required. It is essential to organize your discussions with the respective business teams such as OTC, P2P, and RTR. This will help you assess the most critical business process and pay attention to the critical processes first. Understand the client's business in order to talk in the language that they're familiar with.
- Ensure availability of the respective environments in the landscape to plan development and testing activities (for example, sandbox, development, test, production.
- Plan change management activities, such as organization change management for training and technical change management for managing changes to the production and support track in the landscape, if this is an existing landscape.

Realization

The PM must ensure that milestones are achieved with well-defined stage gates. Unless the work packages delivered for offshore are measured at regular intervals, there is no guarantee of a successful code package delivered to the customer. Hence, agile methods are gaining prominence, as you showcase the product at regular intervals to client stakeholders, without having to wait until the UAT phase. The integration points of the project are crucial for a successful delivery. The PM must spend time with integration leads to understand the complexity, with a timely assessment of risks to monitor and control.

- Ensure that the team success rate is measured and KPIs are achieved such as quality and deliverables on time.
- The development should encompass a detailed functional/technical specification, custom development (forms, reports, interfaces, conversion programs, and enhancements: FRICE) completion status with unit and integration tests completed.
- If there is an additional requirement of automated regression, considering test options such as manual functional testing and performance testing should be part of the overall test strategy.
- Design, develop, and implement test cases for the project as soon as the development activities are done.
- Record risks, and control and monitor risks,
- Implement the core business process.
- Test the implementation.

Final Preparation

The final preparations are crucial, as you're near the critical phase of the project. All your hard work implementing the solution is almost done. Now it's time to Go Live in production. In this stage, you should pay specific attention to the cutover plan, as well as the rollback plan to ensure business continuity and drive a successful Go Live in production by getting technical, functional, and business SMEs together in the war room. Let's review the tasks performed during the dry run and cut-over phases.

- During the dry run, watch out for potential errors in external interfaces. Capture every artifact of the dry run such as downtime in an upgrade or challenges faced during the new installation, in case of an implementation project. The cutover plan should have tasks captured for monitoring processes every hour to ensure a successful Go Live phase.
- Start of production cutover.

Go Live Support

Now, let's analyze the most critical phase of the project, which is the Go Live phase. As a PM, you're responsible for all the cutover activities, communication planning, and discussions with respective stakeholders. As a matter of fact, a major pitfall is lack of communication with the stakeholders, which could lead to a delayed Go Live. Ensure that all stakeholders are apprised of the situation, review the cutover plan after the dry run, and then involve SAP AGS support for a functional Go Live check to ensure that there are no anomalies prior to the Go Live. Also, as a PM, you're responsible for a transition plan to the support team with deliverables such as technical and functional operating manuals. Let's review the critical tasks performed during the go live support phase.

- Ensure that the entire team is geared up for the Go Live; the SMEs, cutover lead, and PM should fasten their seat belts to ensure a successful Go Live.
- Achieve a successful Go Live.
- Complete handover.

Operation

You must plan the transition to ensure that the support team can handle the post-implementation and hypercare support period. Once you deliver a successful Go Live, you must ensure that the required support manuals are complete and up-to-date, with a training plan for technical and functional teams to follow critical processes to ensure a smooth transition. Once you hand off, get a sign-off from the respective business SMEs and the SLAs for post Go Live support. Let's see handover tasks below:

- Ensure a handover to the support manager with all project artifacts and support during the hypercare period for a period of two to three months to ensure a successful post Go Live support without major incidents.
- Support a resolution of incidents as per SLAs, compliant with ITIL processes in service delivery.

Key PMO Startup Activities

Let's look at key project management office (PMO) activities to accomplish. A PM should spend adequate time in each of these specific areas and set up KPIs to achieve successful implementation.

- Identify key stakeholders: You'll need buy-in from all relevant stakeholders in the projects. If there is any difference in the understanding of the project scope, it should be sorted out early on, prior to the sign-off of the blueprint. The blueprint's sign-off indicates you're complying with the scope, schedule, and budget as stated in the statement of work. Hence, there could be conflict at a later stage, if your stakeholders do not agree. For example, a stakeholder responsible for integration might see activities relevant to interface testing as your responsibility, whereas you might think the interface test requirements should be completely done by the respective interface team. You should be prudent and ask questions early to sort out any differences. You should send out a standard report to ensure that all stakeholders are on the same page and aware of any ongoing issues in the project. Also, a regular monthly meeting scheduled to discuss outstanding issues is a good way of keeping the stakeholders aligned.

- Build a high-performing team: All right, you've focused enough on the customer side, requirements, scope, budget, and schedule. However, you don't yet have a high-performance team, which is going to deliver the project. You have to assess each individual on the team for technical capabilities, because SAP projects are primarily skill based. You cannot manage a low-performing team and/or have underskilled workers or trainees. As a general rule of thumb, you must ensure that you have the right people, who are highly skilled and able to deliver the project. A word of caution: I don't mean a consultant, who can answer questions. Instead, you should have individuals who are capable of understanding the business requirements and of mapping them into SAP with good technical and functional expertise, and with similar experience in the line of business (LOB) to deliver the project. You cannot afford to have a mix of high- and low-performing individuals. You must ensure that every individual is adept in responding to the business requirements and able to map to SAP. Above all, a periodic review of individuals to measure performance with metrics will help you succeed.

- Develop a robust project charter: In order to start the work, you'll need an official document signed off for legal purposes such as a statement of work (SOW). The project charter is your bible for the project. You'll define scope, technical implementation strategy, assumptions, and deliverables charted out with a resource strategy.

- Develop L1, L2 project plan: The project plan outlines the implementation, including the infrastructure plan and schedule of every activity. Typically, we use an MS Project plan to list all the tasks with an assigned priority. The plan also helps to measure a unit of work by the respective resources. You'll evolve from the baseline plan to the realization plan after your proof of concept (POC) phase, as you experience the risks and critical path. A robust project plan consists of all activities, including the critical path and task relationships charted out with resource requirements. It defines the milestones. Since the project plan provides the overall roadmap, PMs typically spend a lot of time analyzing the dependencies and the critical path with a start/end date of every activity. The plan should be reviewed on a daily basis to accommodate schedule delays and to reprioritize activities based on availability of the core SMEs from the business side. If the plan is good, realization will be as simple as following the roadmap.

- Develop the work breakdown structure (WBS)): A detailed WBS helps you identify tasks individually. How much time is required for every single task, and how many resources? What type of schedule is required to complete a unit of work? This level of detail will help you monitor the task through completion and compare the actual utilization with the planned. A burn chart indicates the utilization of resources, which will help you assess the partner organizations' gross profit.
- Develop a detailed schedule plan at task level with dependencies and critical path.
- Develop a communication plan: There is a lot of communication overhead in the GD model, as your delivery teams are located across the globe. The communication plan should be clear in terms of a set agenda with details of key participants and action items to cover.
- Develop a QM plan: We talked about the need for a detailed quality plan; every project should encompass a detailed QM plan during the blueprint phase, with the appropriate quality metrics to measure throughout the project to ensure high-quality deliverables.
- Develop delivery metrics: It is imperative to measure performance in terms of cost, schedule, and quality. As noted previously, critical metrics such as CPI and SPI are measured based on earned value metrics. It is important to review metrics at every milestone.

In most organizations, the preceding activities are sets of tasks to complete with tools and standardized templates. You must adhere to the industry standards to ensure that these key startup activities are completed, prior to proceeding to the realization phase.

Realization Tasks

In the realization phase, you'll need a high=performing team, stakeholder communication, and support from time to time, analyzing the overall performance of the project by using appropriate delivery measurements. Above all, the PM should monitor cost, time, and scope, and should analyze risks with control measures. A good project deployment follows project management best practices combined with tools, accelerators, and methods. Tools can help in implementation, which makes a difference by accelerating development and testing phases. In a similar context, metrics can prove that something is right or wrong, but it is up to a PM to study the outcome in every phase, and reorganize tasks as required to bring the project back on track. The main pitfalls to avoid during realization are a lack of process controls and measurement. If there is a variance in schedule or cost, the respective PM must ensure additional controls, or bring the issue up to the steering committee to ensure that appropriate control measures are implemented to avert a major disaster. As the PMI states, most projects fail during the initial phase of design and development. Typically, a PM spends a lot of time strategizing, planning, and communicating with key stakeholders during the prep and blueprint phase. Once you draft the roadmap in the form of a robust project plan, realization can be achieved easily. A PM must provide a good critique to ensure a good understanding of the product ecosystem, as common pitfalls such as lack of product knowledge will lead to failed implementations. A PM must communicate rigorously during integration scenarios to ensure that interface scenarios works with all critical integration points, including non-SAP software.

As discussed, a PM must anticipate risks up front and control problems before the client escalates a problem. Every risk should be controlled before it occurs. You should study the probability of occurrence, the frequency with impact to the business, to be able to monitor and control risks before they escalate into issues.

Another point is that to handle escalations, it is imperative to understand issues and bring them to the table in the steering committee. Often partner organizations hide these potential risks under the carpet, with an assumption of handling them later. As a word of caution, many stakeholders have called off projects because of a lack of communication. This is one of the major pitfalls in project implementation. Every problem has a solution. You must research into the problem to find a viable solution by collaborating with respective stakeholders, solution architects, along with SAP product SMEs that can help in every phase to monitor and control project risks. These services from SAP can guide you throughout the implementation, with services such as Go Live functional checks, or upgrade checks that will avert a major project failure. I recommend a rapid prototype model using agile methods to implement projects. RDS is a new concept in SAP for rapid deployment using SAP best practices that are preconfigured scenarios; however RDS varies from customer to customer, with changes and requirements. In case of RDS implementation, ensure understanding of the product and its capabilities aligning to the business scenario.

Closure

The project lessons learned are one of the most important aspects of what you've done so far. If the results are good, try to benchmark your project to benefit the delivery organization. If the results are bad, document the lessons learned the hard way. Either way, you will have an example of pitfalls to avoid. Some lessons are bitter, as you may end up with a failed implementation project due to product integration issues or client requirements with an unrealistic scope, or even a lack of skills or resources. There are apparent issues in every project. Therefore, due diligence is required throughout the project phases. If your case study becomes a success, reward the team for the good work, and ensure it is part of the project catalog, so that the sales team can use it as a success story. The tools and accelerators that you've used can become part of the standard accelerators package. Further, you can customize the solution for the specific LOB to demonstrate your leadership. Above all, you've gained experience and the team has gained expertise and become more skilled. Perhaps you can use templates for the solution, creating a standard tool suite for similar customers and promoting reusable assets to benefit the organization. If you're able to demonstrate leadership qualities, leading by example from the front, your team will be constantly motivated. A real success is not a one-time endeavor; you'll want to cherish the present moments by working with customers and teams, solving problems with absolute professionalism and ethical responsibilities. If you're demonstrating ethics, your team will follow!

Concluding Remarks

Now, you have a 360-degree view of the SAP project manager's role and responsibilities. It is an exciting and responsive role, and the challenge is to lead your team to ensure a successful implementation project. SAP leadership skills combined with your technical and functional skills will help the team to succeed. If you're able to nip risks in the bud, they can be mitigated early, before escalating. It is an essential attribute of a SAP project manager to anticipate problems in terms of product challenges, integration issues, and skills required. The SAP PM should be diligently aware of upcoming issues, based on studying the project artifacts. Above all, good client leadership, support from stakeholders, and accurate report metrics can guide you to a successful implementation project.