Solutions for the end of Solution Manager

| Abstract

Many SAP customers are already familiar with the scheduled end of support for ECC and the same is also true for SAP Solution Manager. This means many SAP customers have no option but to modernize and transform their SAP operations systems before 2027.

For customers without an extended on premise support contract, access to common features will end across Solution Manager including monitoring, infrastructure management, change management, testing and test data and many other core IT operations. The recommended replacement for Solution Manager, SAP Cloud ALM, is years away from complete feature parity and will never have parity in some areas.

This paper explores the operational exposures for SAP customers with the end of Solution Manager and the functional loss in many IT Operations categories. The exploration extends to the gap for large enterprise customers with any mix of ECC on prem, S/4HANA on prem, hyperscaler environments and RISE without Solution Manager.

A specific focus is placed on the functionality of SAP Solution Manager for monitoring and automation, Focused Run and SAP LaMa products, and suitable 3rd party solutions to replace and improve the end of support situation for customers presently using these technologies.

History

The end of support and investment in Solution Manager is decades in the making and a consequence of larger strategic initiatives by SAP. Released in 2015, S/4HANA has long been identified as the successor to ECC, Solution Manager's native environment.

Solution Manager, Focused Run and SAP LaMa offer S/4HANA support and some functionality in Cloud and SaaS (RISE) deployments. However, SAP's market strategy pivoted to the new Cloud ALM product designed specifically for these environments. This resulted in a decision to end support for Solution Manager and related products, scheduled for 2027.

For new customers to SAP with less legacy and complexity in their SAP deployments, Cloud ALM often provides suitable core functionality. For the large enterprise, deployments across a mix of ECC, on prem, hyperscaler and potentially RISE are common. Many of these customers have final ECC decommissioning schedules well beyond 2027 and may find the end of support for Solution Manager especially problematic. Customers not purchasing extended support must end their use of Solution Manager at the end of their SAP support contract.

Solution Manager today

The initial release of Solution Manager came in the mid 2000s and has remained a staple of SAP ECC and on prem S/4 deployments since. Solution Manager sees retirement at version 7.2, dozens of releases and service packs later, and serves as a central point of managing SAP implementations for many companies.

Over time, Solution Manager has grown to provide a substantial range of functionality, and premium products related to Solution Manager functionality – specifically SAP LaMa and Focused Run – provide enhanced capabilities in specific operational areas.

Key areas include:

- Change Management, often referred to as transport management or configuration management, and implemented mostly by the ChaRM module of Solution Manager
- Monitoring covering a large range of monitoring types including system, user experience, integration and job/batch execution monitoring. A related product in this category is Focused Run
- Testing, including test management, test execution and test data management
- Data management and archiving
- Security in the form of patch management and enhancement packages
- Business Process Operations including Documentation and "Blueprinting"
- Landscape Management with both included/free and upgrade/premium options of SAP LaMa
- Project Management, including Change Request and Requirements Management

I Solution Manager today, cont.

Given the range and scope of Solution Manager functionality across management and operational aspects of running SAP, it would be surprising to find a large ECC deployment not using Solution Manager in some capacity.

SAP customers facing the end of support for Solution Manager are unlikely to easily find feature parity alternative solutions and will need to address critical Solution Manager functions incrementally during the final retirement of existing SAP deployments.
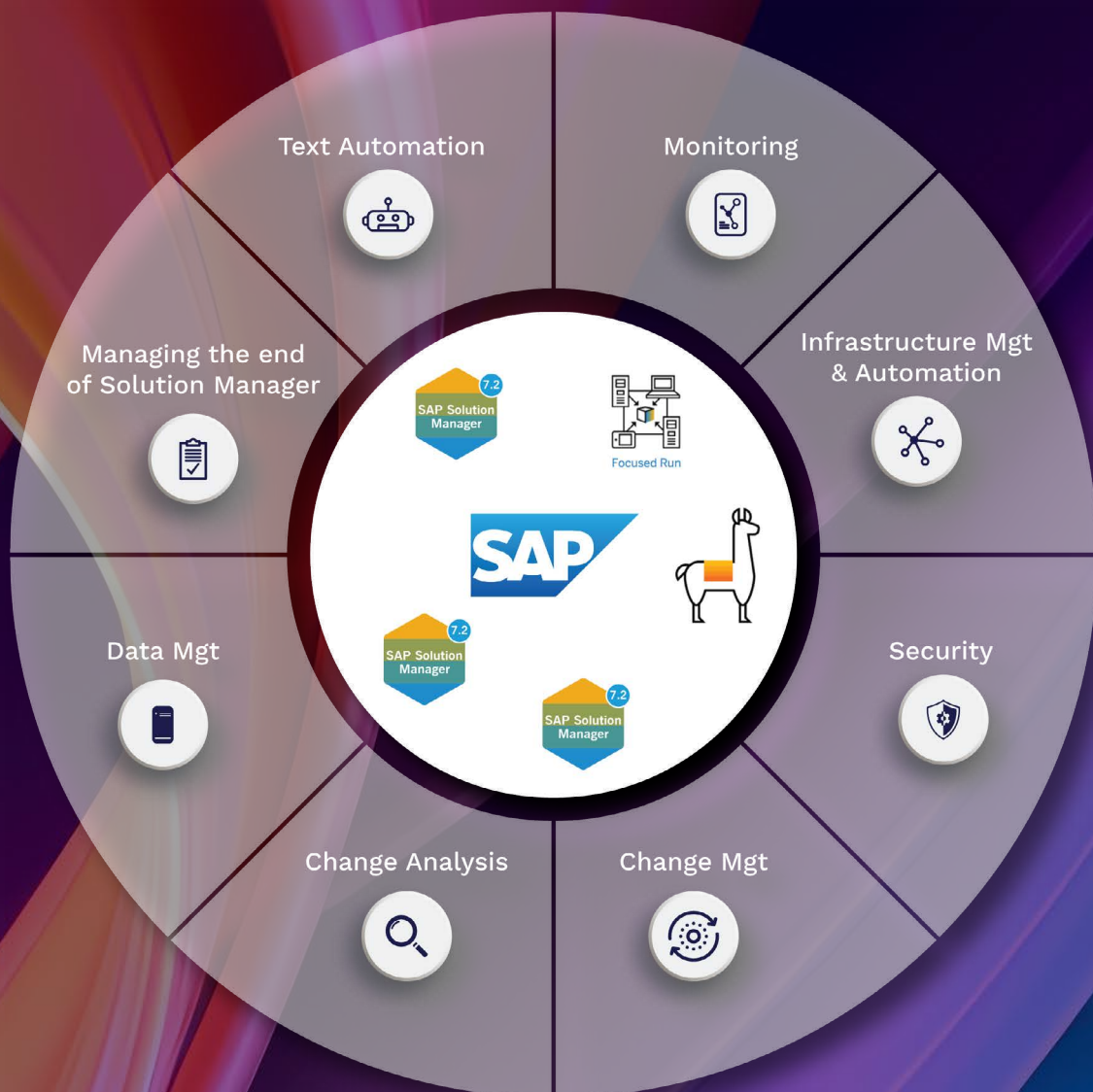

Figure 1 - Managing the end of solution manager will require specialized SAP management functionality in several disciplines for more SAP customers

Staying calm despite the gap

SAP advocates Cloud ALM as the replacement for Solution Manager. This option will be viable for some portion of the SAP installed base, especially those running smaller, less complex single landscapes in a cloud context only. For large environments with complexities such as hybrid infrastructure (deployments across on prem, hyperscaler and possibly RISE), project landscapes and complex ECC to S/4HANA migration projects, Cloud ALM is missing significant functionality compared to Solution Manager and has little to no roadmap for extensive support for systems on premise.

While over time one should anticipate the delivery of improvements in Cloud ALM, SAP has been forthcoming with documentation on functional areas out of scope or not planned for Cloud ALM vs Solution Manager:

https://support.sap.com/en/alm/sap-cloud-alm/transition-to-sap-cloud-alm/transition-to-calm-implementation.html

For many organizations, even if required functionality is promised in Cloud ALM, roadmap timing creates a solution gap of years to manage, an impractical timeline for most SAP customers. The situation is similar for customers using Focused Run or SAP LaMa solutions.

These customers, especially the large, complex enterprises with multiple SAP deployments, will have to look beyond just SAP for solutions.

Focus area: Monitoring, automation and landscape management

The functional coverage of Solution Manager is broad, and most customers don't use everything Solution Manager has on offer. However, technical monitoring, automation and landscape management are commonly deployed, and the related solutions Focused Run and Landscape Management (LaMa) are often used in conjunction with Solution Manager given their extended capabilities in this discipline.

With Solution Manager and Focused Run end of support coming concurrently with Solution Manager in 2027 – and a few exceptions for planned deliverables through 2030 – depending on a customer's support contract, operations using these solutions will lose high volume monitoring, alerting, operational analysis and root cause identification, among other key features. Focused Run features capabilities for managing distributed SAP environments on a single pane of glass, a feature not equally well implemented in Cloud ALM as of 2024.

With LaMa, SAP customers are losing key automation for common tasks including SAP administration, provisioning, orchestration and patching – useful in zero downtime environments or for simply reducing human effort and error in common upkeep tasks for SAP run environments. Modern software development and testing methodologies, increasingly adopted by SAP teams, increase the demand for test data and available development systems, placing time and staff intensive processes on already stretched operations teams including system refresh and copy and BDLS runtimes.

These challenges aren't all unique to SAP. However, SAP elected to end support for existing and accepted solutions to them. SAP did so without an equally functional solution available and no roadmap for a full replacement of existing functionality. There is additional functionality loss to document from the Solution Manager end of support beyond monitoring and landscape functionality, especially in change management, data management and security.

Avantra AIOps & Avantra AIR

Avantra provides solutions for systems management and automation of SAP IT Operations. The Avantra 24 solution is widely regarded in SAP operations circles for the robust range of functionality, ideally suited for complex customers with multiple SAP landscapes across different deployment topologies. The Avantra 24 solution implements the concepts of AIOps for SAP and coupled with Avantra AIR, provides AI empowered solutions for efficiently managing the most complex SAP deployments.

Many SAP customers have selected Avantra over Solution Manager, Focused Run and SAP LaMa long before the announcement of the end of support for these solutions, demonstrating the value of the Avantra solution. The current gap between Solution Manager and Cloud ALM makes Avantra's choice evident to a broader range of SAP customers.

Specific to the end of Solution Manager, Focused Run and SAP LaMa, customers electing to implement Avantra as a replacement technology would expect to enjoy these additional advantages and benefits:

- Monitoring on prem, cloud and RISE deployments, leveraging AI Ops for automatic, real time observability modeled exclusively from the use patterns of the specific customer environment

- Fully automate landscape management tasks, featuring built in automation for common SAP checks and many other time consuming regular SAP operations tasks

- Vastly accelerate common automations like System Refresh, often by 10x or more, including automated execution of pre and post copy activities

- Automatically diagnose and correct potential system incidents and reduce human research time via automated root cause analysis

- Automatically prepare and recommend incident response procedures, assisting SAP staff experienced and new with the correct actions and procedures for issue remediation

- Manage notifications and integrations, including ITSM Integration to ServiceNow's incident management, event management, CMDB data and automation approval tracking

Conclusion

The end of support for Solution Manager is a serious event for many SAP customers. Many will require operational support for legacy configurations and runtime environments years or even decades beyond the official end of support from SAP and likely past the technical or useful utility of Solution Manager itself due to some future unforeseen compatibility or security issue over time. Customers with longer schedules for the final retirement of ECC should critically evaluate the portions of Solution Manager and related functionality configured for use in their environments and look to the 3rd party SAP ecosystem for solutions to fill the gap left by the end of Solution Manager.

While potentially disruptive, the change to non SAP solutions for systems management and other SAP Operations functions will likely bring benefits. The 3rd party ecosystem exists for a reason: many SAP customers found these solutions deliver more robust functionality, lower operating costs, better security, enhanced automation or other operational benefits. These solutions exist because they are superior to the standard SAP solutions offered. SAP customers forced to look beyond SAP for IT Operations solutions may discover advantages they did not previously anticipate, reducing their specific dependence on SAP for solutions to non core aspects of their deployment operations while increasing the value and longevity of existing SAP deployments and investments.

I Further reading:

Traditional vs AIOps

AI receives generous attention, and SAP has made significant progress introducing AI to core ERP functionality. AI has a place in IT operations too, but this is a place SAP has not made significant deliveries to date.

AIOps is an evolutionary development in IT operations, leveraging AI technology for systems management. AI has shown benefits to IT operations including increasing automation, efficiency and less error prone operations. Often, AIOps reduces dependencies on human interaction, especially for less valuable, repetitive tasks such as monitoring and threat analysis. Although a newer concept, AIOps is a When evaluating AI Ops solutions for any environment, consider some key ideals:

- Where is the data collected for the model of your environment stored and used? Depending on your industry, using generative AI platforms that use your data for broader tuning purposes beyond your environment may be inappropriate or even a violation of operational requirements

- Does the model train on your environment, or mostly depend on pre trained data? While pre trained models will provide insights sooner, these insights can be misleading or inaccurate if trained on systems missing unique attributes or context of your environment. Likewise, training on your environment takes some time but is ultimately more accurate and fit for purpose

- For now, AI solutions specialized to specific tasks perform best. Examples of AI applications in SAP operations that work consistently well include observing monitor metrics and automatically identifying outlying production behavior, identifying and diagnosing likely or actual system failures and their root causes, and recommending remediation activities suitable for expert and less trained operations staff to execute

3rd Party Solutions

- Recent investments in products at SAP have focused more on the core ERP solution, including the introduction of AI, than on the ancillary and support features of the product, including Cloud ALM and Solution Manager. Although not formally documented or announced, communications in presentations by SAP at events and forums have indicated a focus on the core business software as paramount and shared a more relaxed attitude towards 3rd party vendors providing SAP management solutions historically considered competitors

- This is good news for SAP customers, ensuring continued innovation in the core business capabilities of SAP. Many of these same customers have already discovered a best of breed approach for operating SAP works best: use SAP for core ERP and look to solutions in the SAP ecosystem for the management and operations of SAP, especially in environments mixing multiple applications, deployment strategies, integrations and high complexity

- AIOps, IT Operations, Change Management, Security Management, and Data Management have 3rd party ecosystem solutions significantly more capable than Solution Manager, Focused Run, or SAP LaMa. The combination of change in SAP product focus and the end of support for existing tooling creates an ideal time for SAP customers to reimagine what SAP IT Operations should be and evaluate ideal solutions beyond the constraints of legacy SAP functionality

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