National Austrian Railway (ÖBB)

Agile Transformation of SAP Operations

THE SITUATION

Establishing Structure in a Complex SAP Environment

As part of ÖBB's broader SAFe transformation, the head of the SAP department identified the need to introduce greater transparency, structured prioritisation, and improved delivery management across SAP operations.

Work was primarily managed through shared mailboxes and SAP Solution Manager without a consistent mechanism for prioritisation, ownership, or visibility. Incidents, service requests, operational activities, and development work were managed through multiple channels, making it difficult to establish a clear overview of workload, capacity, and delivery status.

Teams were required to balance operational support with project-related activities while responding to continuously changing business demands. Leadership had limited visibility into work in progress, pending requests, delivery bottlenecks, and overall team capacity. As a result, prioritisation decisions, stakeholder communication, and capacity planning were often based on incomplete information.

The objective of the transformation was to establish a sustainable operating model that increased transparency, enabled structured demand management, and improved delivery predictability without disrupting critical business operations.

THE APPROACH

A Pragmatic Operating Model for SAP Operations

Rather than applying a standard agile framework, the operating model was designed around the realities of SAP operations. The approach combined Scrum, Kanban, and SAFe practices to accommodate planned development activities, operational support, incidents, and service requests within a unified delivery model.

The transformation focused on four objectives:

- Establishing clear ownership and accountability
- Creating transparency across all work items
- Introducing structured prioritisation and planning processes
- Enabling measurable delivery performance

The implementation followed an incremental approach, beginning with a pilot and expanding gradually across the department.

TRANSFORMATION OVERVIEW

From Reactive Demand Management to Structured Delivery

Initial State

- Work managed through mailboxes and SAP Solution Manager
- No consolidated overview across teams
- Limited transparency of workload and priorities
- Difficulty measuring delivery performance

Leadership Alignment

- Workshops with department leadership and team leads
- Definition of roles, governance model, team structures, and delivery cadence
- Alignment on the future operating model

Finance Pilot

- Introduction of Product Owner and Scrum Master responsibilities
- Sprint-based planning and delivery
- Hands-on coaching and operational support

Jira Rollout

- Team-specific projects, workflows, and boards
- Integration with SAP Solution Manager
- Automated ticket creation and traceability

Department-Wide Expansion

- Rollout to SAP BI, SAP Supply Chain, SAP Basis and SAP Platform teams
- Continuous coaching and optimisation

Target State

- Transparent workload management
- Structured prioritisation
- Improved coordination across teams
- Measurable delivery performance

IMPLEMENTATION JOURNEY

From Leadership Workshop to Operational Practice

Leadership Alignment and Operating Model Design

The transformation began with a two-day workshop involving the SAP department head, team leads, and SAP project management representatives. The sessions established a shared understanding of Scrum, Kanban, and SAFe principles and focused on their practical application within SAP operations. Together, leadership defined team structures, delivery cadences, ownership models, backlog management processes, and governance mechanisms. The workshop also explored the integration of SAP Solution Manager and Jira, laying the foundation for a transparent system supporting both operational work and delivery management.

Starting with a Controlled Pilot

To minimise operational disruption, the transformation was initially introduced within two Finance teams responsible for SAP FI and SAP CO. Before launch, Jira was configured in collaboration with the Jira administration team. Team-specific projects, workflows, boards, and integrations with SAP Solution Manager were established and tested. Once the environment was operational, teams were introduced to the new delivery model, including defined roles, planning ceremonies, and backlog management practices. Ongoing coaching supported Product Owners, Scrum Masters, and team members throughout the implementation, allowing challenges to be addressed pragmatically and in real time.

Creating Transparency Through Jira

SAP Solution Manager remained the primary operational system throughout the transformation. Jira introduced an additional layer of visibility and workflow management that enabled teams and leadership to understand what work was currently in progress, who was responsible for individual items, what work was planned for upcoming iterations, where bottlenecks existed, and how workload was distributed across teams. For the first time, delivery performance became measurable: Sprint and Kanban reporting enabled teams and management to assess completed work, throughput, delivery trends, and capacity utilisation over defined periods. Building on the successful Finance pilot, the Jira-based delivery model was expanded across the department, ensuring consistent visibility and traceability of work.

IMPLEMENTATION JOURNEY (CONTINUED)

Hybrid Delivery and Shared Development Capacity

Introducing a Hybrid Delivery Model

Different operating models were introduced based on the nature of each team's work. Scrum was adopted by teams managing structured delivery work with predictable planning horizons, including SAP Finance (FI/CO), SAP BI, and SAP Supply Chain teams supporting modules such as Materials Management (MM), Quality Management (QM), and Logistics. Kanban was introduced for service-oriented teams managing continuous incoming demand, including SAP Basis and SAP Platform operations. Clear governance mechanisms ensured that planned work, incidents, service requests, and SLA-driven activities could coexist within a single operating framework.

Establishing a Shared Development Service Model

Not all SAP teams had dedicated development resources available to them. Development activities such as SAP customisations, enhancements, interfaces, and technical implementations relied on a limited number of specialised developers supporting multiple teams across the department. To manage this demand effectively, the developers were organised as a shared service team supported by a dedicated Kanban board. Teams requesting development work identified relevant tickets through a defined categorisation mechanism, allowing those requests to be automatically reflected on the development team's board. Before each planning cycle, the Product Owner of the development team aligned with Product Owners from the Finance, BI, and SAP Supply Chain teams to understand upcoming priorities, urgent requests, and delivery expectations. Based on this alignment, development capacity was allocated and prioritised according to overall business needs and available resources. This approach created transparency around development demand, established a structured prioritisation process for specialised development capacity, and enabled stakeholders to track progress through a shared visual workflow.

Scaling Across the Department

Following the successful pilot, the operating model was gradually introduced to SAP BI, SAP Supply Chain, SAP Basis, and SAP Platform teams. Each rollout combined structured onboarding with ongoing coaching, ensuring that implementation reflected the specific requirements and maturity level of each team.

TRANSFORMATION OUTCOMES

From Reactive Operations to Structured, Measurable Delivery

SAP Basis and SAP Platform: From Reactive Operations to Structured Service Delivery

SAP Basis and SAP Platform teams transitioned from mailbox-driven work management to a structured and transparent service delivery model. Automated ticket creation, visual workflow management, and defined prioritisation mechanisms provided visibility into incoming demand, operational workload, and service requests. Workload distribution became transparent and manageable, while regular team alignment improved escalation handling, incident resolution, and SLA compliance. The result was a more predictable operating model with greater transparency, accountability, and visibility for both teams and leadership.

SAP BI: Improved Visibility and Delivery Management

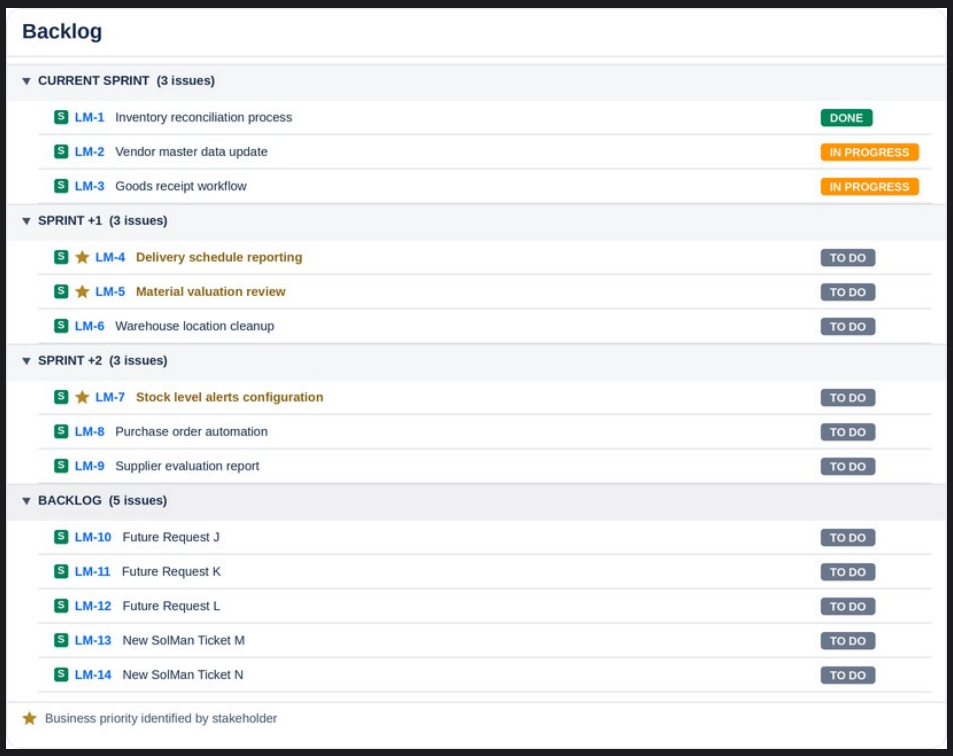
The BI team established a consistent Scrum-based delivery model supported by clearly defined Product Owner and Scrum Master responsibilities. Regular planning, review, and alignment activities created a transparent approach to managing workload and priorities. A particularly effective practice involved visual monitoring of ageing tickets. Jira automatically highlighted work items that had not progressed within defined timeframes, allowing delays and blockers to be identified early. This provided the Product Owner with a real-time overview of progress, pending work, and emerging risks while also improving transparency in stakeholder discussions.

SAP Supply Chain Teams: Enabling Business-Driven Prioritisation

One of the most significant outcomes of the transformation was the increased involvement of business stakeholders in prioritisation decisions. Incoming requests from SAP Solution Manager were automatically reflected within Jira, providing stakeholders with visibility into upcoming work. The SAP Supply Chain teams operated with a transparent sprint-based backlog structure that included current work, upcoming sprint commitments, and future demand. Business stakeholders could indicate priority requests for upcoming iterations, while Product Owners balanced these requests against team capacity, operational commitments, and delivery objectives. This created a collaborative prioritisation process that improved transparency, reduced coordination effort, and provided stakeholders with greater confidence regarding delivery expectations.

FIGURE

Jira Backlog Structure: Business-Driven Prioritisation



Items marked with a ★ *star indicate requests that the client specifically flagged as a priority for that sprint; unmarked items follow the standard backlog order.*

This demonstrates that stakeholders influence prioritisation while Product Owners retain responsibility for balancing demand, capacity, and delivery commitments.

DEPARTMENT-WIDE IMPACT

- End-to-end visibility across SAP workstreams
- Structured prioritisation replacing reactive demand management
- Faster handling of incidents and service requests
- Measurable delivery performance through sprint and Kanban reporting
- Improved management of shared development capacity
- Greater delivery predictability through transparent planning and workload management
- Improved stakeholder engagement through transparent prioritisation
- Sustainable operating model aligned with ÖBB's SAFe transformation

CONCLUSION

Establishing Sustainable Delivery in SAP Operations

The transformation enabled the SAP department to move from reactive work management towards a structured operating model characterised by greater transparency, clearer ownership, and more effective prioritisation.

Rather than applying a standard framework, the solution combined Scrum, Kanban, and SAFe practices according to the operational requirements of individual teams. The phased implementation approach reduced organisational risk while allowing the operating model to evolve based on practical experience.

The resulting delivery model improved visibility across SAP operations, strengthened stakeholder engagement, enhanced coordination of shared development capacity, and provided management with reliable insight into workload, capacity, and delivery performance.

The engagement demonstrates that agile principles can be successfully applied within operational SAP environments when governance, delivery processes, and team structures are adapted to the realities of the organisation.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Operational environments benefit most from agile practices when governance, prioritisation mechanisms, and delivery processes are tailored to the organisation's context rather than implemented through a standard framework.

BEFORE AND AFTER

BEFORE	AFTER
Work managed through inboxes and SAP Solution Manager	All work visible and traceable through Jira
Limited visibility of priorities	Structured backlog management and prioritisation
Requests could remain unresolved without visibility	Transparent workflow and ownership
SLA tracking difficult	SLA management visible and measurable
Development demand managed informally across teams	Shared Development Service Model with transparent prioritisation
No consolidated workload overview	Full visibility for teams and leadership
Delivery performance difficult to measure	Measurable throughput and reporting