TIMING

The real deadline isn't the vendor's

A vendor's end-of-support date is a real constraint and a manufactured urgency at the same time. Confusing the two lets someone else's calendar drive your transformation.

Roltrader Consultancy Group · 5 min read

There is a date circled on most ERP programmes, and it belongs to the vendor: the end of mainstream support for the system you are on. It is real. Running unsupported enterprise software is a genuine risk, and the date is not arbitrary. But it is worth being clear-eyed about whose deadline it is. It is the vendor's — set by the vendor's product lifecycle, timed to the vendor's commercial interest in moving you to the next thing — and letting it become the organising principle of your transformation quietly hands the pace of a business decision to someone whose incentives are not yours.

The danger is not the date itself. It is what urgency does to judgement. A programme run against someone else's clock rushes the decisions that most need deliberation and defers the ones that most need to happen early — an inversion that the deadline makes feel responsible.

Two kinds of deadline, easily confused

The vendor's deadline is a *constraint*: after this date, support changes, and you must have a plan for that. Your deadline is an *outcome*: the point by which the business needs the new capability to be delivering value. These are not the same date, and treating them as one is where the trouble starts. The constraint tells you when you can no longer stay where you are. It says nothing about when you should arrive somewhere new, or by what route, or whether arriving late-but-right beats arriving on-time-but-wrong. Only the business can set that, and only if it refuses to let the constraint answer the question for it.

> The vendor's date tells you when you can't stay. It does not tell you when to arrive, by what route, or whether rushing there is worth it. Only the business can.

What urgency corrupts first

When the maintenance calendar drives the pace, the casualties are predictable. Scope gets frozen before it is understood, because there is no time to reopen it. Testing gets compressed, because it sits just before the immovable date. The operating-model decisions that should have been settled early get deferred, because the visible deadline is technical cutover, not the design work that should precede it. The programme ends up sprinting hardest at exactly the phase where haste is most expensive, and strolling through the early phase where the decisions that determine everything were cheap to get right.

Options the deadline hides

Framing the vendor's date as *the* deadline also conceals that you have choices about the constraint itself. Extended support, third-party support, a phased path, a deliberate interim step — each changes what the date actually forces and buys room to run the transformation at the pace the business needs rather than the pace the lifecycle dictates. None of these may be right for you. But not knowing they exist, because the vendor's calendar was accepted as the only clock, is how organisations end up rushing a decade-defining decision to hit a date that was always more negotiable than it looked.

> **Where we sit.** Roltrader's PRAIS layer models the real cost and risk of each path — including staying put longer under alternative support — from your own estate, so the timing decision is yours rather than the vendor's. But the reframe costs nothing: treat the end-of-support date as a constraint to plan around, not a deadline to be governed by, and let the business set the pace its outcome actually requires.