



Building a better
working world

How an agile SAP approach gave Eversource a power surge

Rewiring its SAP S/4HANA® customer information system helps a major energy provider keep essential resources flowing.

■ The better the question

How can agile methodology power up customer service?

A stronger, more transparent connection with customers gives Eversource an edge in the energy field.

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Essential services such as natural gas, water and electricity are simply expected to flow – into furnaces, faucets and outlets. When you are the company responsible for providing these basic elements to more than four million customers in the United States (US), you need your technology systems to operate with reliability and speed.

Eversource Energy, a publicly traded Fortune 500 company based in the region of New England, the name given to a collection of six states in northeastern US, is the reliable power and utilities giant serving most of the states of Massachusetts, Connecticut and New Hampshire. With roots dating to the early 1900s, Eversource is a national leader in a highly regulated industry, striving to keep pace with rising consumer expectations, changing regulatory requirements, and ever-expanding infrastructure demands.

As the power and utilities sector becomes increasingly technology-dependent and driven, Eversource recognized the need for a complete digital transformation to upscale its systems and support future customer-focused innovations.

The goal was to build an enhanced Customer Information System (CIS) on the SAP S/4HANA® platform in a private cloud – seamlessly integrating some 50 disparate systems. This would allow Eversource the ability to collect, store, analyze and manage its customer data in a single, unified tool. Migrations of this scale and complexity require rigorous planning, significant resources and the workforce experience to optimize the sustained advantages of the CIS application.

Conceived and executed in collaboration with Ernst & Young LLP (EY), the Eversource CIS initiative is transforming this premiere utility company's relationship with its customers from a routine monthly bill to a more dynamic, transparent and interactive connection that better aligns with rising customer expectations and environmental needs. For example, advising customers about the times when energy use is at its peak can help them adjust their consumption habits, offering advantages to the company, cost savings for the customers, and environmental benefits for upcoming generations.

In Phase 1 of the deployment, Eversource used the traditional waterfall implementation approach to transition approximately 330,000 consumers – just under 10% of its total customer base – onto the new SAP platform. Facing the transition of approximately two million more customers in Phase 2, the company, in collaboration with EY professionals and SAP alliance team members, recognized that embracing an agile methodology would result in enhanced governance and a faster deployment. These benefits could also be extended to future technology rollouts.

Agile methodology

Agile methodology allows various deployment workstreams to be completed simultaneously by encouraging team members to approach tasks incrementally, limiting time wasted by unexpected obstacles. This approach differs from waterfall implementations, which demand strict adherence to a linear schedule for task completion.

Shifting gears fulfills Eversource's need for speed

Sprinting to the future with agile methodology



The team at Eversource was familiar with agile methodology, but only a few CIS project participants had concrete experience with this implementation process. EY transformation, design and execution teams, along with Eversource's IT Agile Center of Excellence, were brought in to quickly familiarize the broader team with agile techniques.

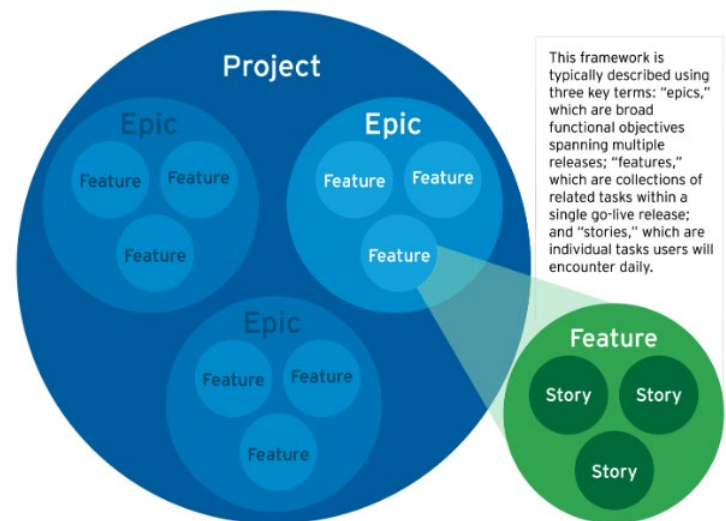
The team started by assessing Eversource's agile maturity, formulating a roadmap for gradual capability enablement to deploy the new SAP functions swiftly with minimal delays. The group conducted 25 hours of Scaled Agile Framework (SAFe) training to introduce employees to the agile organization and workflow patterns intended to promote alignment, collaboration and successful delivery across Eversource's large number of stakeholders.

To familiarize the broader team with agile capabilities, standard processes were implemented within days of the program kickoff. Daily stand-up meetings were instituted to discuss progress, risks and roadblocks as teams formulated Business Process Documents (BPDs) – the who, what, when, where and why of individual tasks. These BPDs, leveraging the EY Energy Industry Cloud for SAP solutions, would guide the relevant business areas across 10 critical workstreams, including correspondence, customer service, reporting, device management, and billing and payment.

Stand-ups were also an opportunity to introduce teams to the role of a scrum master. SAFe-certified scrum masters and coaches led the daily calls and leveraged the forum to continuously coach and upskill employees, addressing daily bubble-up topics on the fly. The work done to introduce the agile cadence and methodologies helped lay the groundwork for a more seamless transition into the design, build and test portion of the SAP CIS deployment.

Once BPDs were finalized, the entire SAP implementation shifted to a more formal SAFe agile approach. This framework is typically described using three key terms: "epics," which are broad functional objectives spanning multiple releases; "features," which are collections of related tasks within a single go-live release; and "stories," which are individual tasks users will encounter daily.

SAFe methodology



The program was divided into three Program Increments (PIs) with teams gathering quarterly. These broad-scale meetings gave all stakeholders the opportunity to identify cross-team dependencies, mitigate major risks, and set the entire team up for a successful PI delivery.

The structures and tools tailor-made for the CIS deployment were designed to drive effective governance and organizational agility to improve deployment processes, accelerate workflows and identify redundant tasks. With each PI, the integration of agile practices became more refined, boosting the program's momentum. This progress did not go unnoticed, as leadership acknowledged the effectiveness of the new deployment methodology.

"The shift to agile meant seamlessly connecting both business and technology team members in new and productive ways," says David Coco, Customer Group IT Director at Eversource. "Further, this approach helped us accelerate our customer-focused business objectives."

This project was among the first-ever scaled, agile SAP implementations utilizing industry-leading SAFe methodology principles for a power and utilities company. It presented a tremendous opportunity for Eversource to advance its company goals while meeting regulatory requirements and better serving its customers.

Bringing new energy to customer service

An agile approach lays the pipeline for future transitions.

Shifting from a waterfall approach to an agile mindset helped accelerate the CIS deployment timeline, and Eversource launched its first release successfully and on schedule.

Increase in features conducted

30%

Program Increment 1 vs. Program Increment 2

Increase in stories conducted

40%

Program Increment 1 vs. Program Increment 2

The new approach helped the teams embrace adaptability, allowing members to quickly respond to changes or unexpected challenges. From PI1 to PI2, project efficiency jumped – 40% more stories and 30% more features were conducted during the second program increment.

The agile approach also helped to identify and descope redundant and low-value features. In the correspondence epic – which contained 150 features – the teams' agile implementation consolidated 30 customer communication features into one consistent format, reducing the overall feature collection in this epic alone by 14%.

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David Coco

Customer Group IT Director at Eversource

The pivot to agile encouraged CIS leaders to refocus, raise challenges and course-correct along the way. By identifying the integration requirements of more than 50 cross-functional and external vendor systems, the CIS function is now equipped to help ensure that all the data is flowing smoothly and accurately among systems.

“Our work with Eversource is a prime example of what agile implementation can do for clients in the energy sector and others,” says Connie Carden, EY Global Client Service Partner; Managing Director, Markets and Business Development, Ernst & Young LLP. “Thanks to an improved technology infrastructure, Eversource employees will be able to deploy products and services more quickly and effectively. The real win is for the energy consumers who will receive better service thanks to the shared goals and dedicated, collaborative efforts of our two organizations.”

The teams' broad approach not only enhanced Eversource's proficiency in agile methodologies, but it also provided a strategic playbook for integrating agile principles into future technology transitions, positioning the company for sustained success with technology implementations.

“For our customers, this project is not a technology implementation,” Coco says. “It's a means to keep the lights on.”

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