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SU24 Variants: What are they are how to use them'

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Executive Summary

SAP's authorisation framework is designed to balance flexibility with control. Within this framework, **SU24 variants** provide a powerful way to tailor authorisation proposals to different contexts without altering the global defaults. They allow organisations to define alternative sets of proposals for specific transactions or programmes, supporting nuanced role design and complex business requirements. However, their misuse can introduce inconsistency, confusion, and audit risk. This paper explains what SU24 variants are, how they should be used, and the best practices and pitfalls to be mindful of.

What Are SU24 Variants?

SU24 is the transaction used to maintain customer authorisation proposals. Normally, proposals are defined globally for each transaction or programme. A **variant** in SU24 allows the security team to define an alternative set of proposals that can be applied under certain conditions. In practice, this means that a single transaction can have multiple proposal definitions, each variant reflecting a different business scenario.

Variants are particularly useful in environments where the same transaction is used in different ways by different user groups. For example, a reporting transaction might require broad authorisations for administrators but only limited display rights for end users. Instead of maintaining one global proposal and manually adjusting roles, variants allow these differences to be captured systematically.

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Why Variants Matter

The introduction of variants provides flexibility, but it also introduces complexity. Without variants, SU24 proposals are uniform and predictable. With variants, proposals can diverge depending on which variant is applied. This can be a strength when managed carefully, as it allows roles to be built more accurately to business needs. It can also be a weakness if variants are created without clear governance, leading to inconsistent role design and difficulty in troubleshooting.

In migrations to S/4HANA, variants can be particularly valuable. Many transactions are replaced or re-engineered, and variants allow organisations to capture different authorisation requirements without disrupting the global baseline. They provide a way to adapt proposals to new applications while maintaining control.

Best Practices for Using SU24 Variants

The first principle of using SU24 variants is **clarity of purpose**. Variants should only be created when there is a genuine need to differentiate proposals for the same transaction. Each variant should be documented with its intended use case, so that future administrators understand why it exists.

Secondly, organisations should establish **naming conventions** for variants. A clear, descriptive naming scheme avoids confusion and makes it easier to identify the correct variant during role design.

Thirdly, variants should be reviewed regularly, ideally as part of the same governance cycle as SU24 proposals. This ensures that they remain aligned with business processes and do not proliferate unnecessarily.

Finally, variants should be integrated into the overall role design methodology. Role builders must be trained to recognise when a variant is appropriate and how to apply it. Without this training, variants may be ignored or misapplied, undermining their value.

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Pitfalls to Avoid

The most common pitfall with SU24 variants is **overuse**. Creating too many variants dilutes their effectiveness and makes the authorisation landscape harder to manage. Each variant adds complexity, and if variants are created for minor differences, the result is confusion rather than clarity.

Another pitfall is **poor documentation**. Variants that are not clearly described can lead to errors in role design, as administrators may not understand which variant to use. This is particularly problematic during audits, where undocumented variants raise questions about control and governance.

A further risk is **inconsistency across systems**. Because SU24 data is system-local, variants created in development must be carefully managed to ensure they are available when roles are built. If variants are missing or misaligned, roles may generate incorrectly, leading to gaps in production.

Finally, there is the danger of **variant drift**. Over time, variants may be adjusted without proper review, leading to divergence from the global baseline. This undermines the principle of least privilege and can introduce security vulnerabilities.

Recommendations

Organisations should adopt a disciplined approach to SU24 variants. Create them only, when necessary, document them thoroughly, and enforce naming conventions. Review them regularly alongside SU24 proposals, and train role builders to apply them correctly. Avoid proliferation by consolidating variants wherever possible and monitor for drift to ensure they remain aligned with business needs.

By following these practices, SU24 variants can be a powerful tool for tailoring authorisation proposals without sacrificing control. Misused, they can become a source of inconsistency and risk. Managed well, they enhance flexibility, support complex role design, and strengthen the organisation’s overall security posture.

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Conclusion

SU24 variants extend the flexibility of SAP's authorisation framework, allowing organisations to define alternative proposals for the same transaction. They are particularly valuable in complex environments and during migrations, where different user groups require different levels of access. However, they must be managed with care. Overuse, poor documentation, and lack of governance can quickly turn variants from an asset into a liability.

Disciplined use of SU24 variants — guided by clear purpose, strong naming conventions, regular review, and integration into role design methodology — ensures that they deliver value without introducing risk. In this way, variants become not just a technical feature, but a strategic enabler of secure and compliant SAP operations.