

Podcast: Can You Have a Sustainable SAP Career in...Sustainability?

"A two way discussion on the greening of SAP skills, SAP's sustainability direction, and SAP sustainability community resources"

Podcast Interview Date: July 12, 2010

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Recently I taped a two-way discussion on careers in SAP sustainability with fellow SAP Mentor Jim Spath. Although Jim does not work in sustainability on a day to day basis, he's one of the most influential community voices in this area and has a 20 year background as an environmental engineer in his pre-SAP life. He is the moderator of the SAP Community Network Sustainability Forum. When we taped this thirty minute discussion, Jim and I were fresh off an SAP Mentor session on SAP's sustainability strategy with Jeremiah Stone of SAP. We wanted to react to that session - though some of it was "not bloggable" and we kept that content out. There were other SAP sustainability events to react to also, but mostly, we wanted to riff on SAP careers in sustainability and talk about the skills and the impact we can have by greening our SAP careers.

About Jim: Jim Spath is a Technical Architect with a global manufacturer. He's an SAP Mentor and a long time ASUG volunteer. He writes some of the most readable technical blogs on SCN. The views Jim expresses on this podcast are only his personal views and are not made on behalf of any of his organizational affiliations.

Show notes: This was not only a two-way discussion, it was a two-way taping. Jim posted a writeup with show notes and resource links on SCN that is his version of the recording. Each of our recordings had its tradeoffs, the one you are listening to here has an excellent recording of my voice and Jim coming through on speakerphone. My version of the sound file is cleaned up slightly and I have added musical intros and outros. I didn't feel that my existing JonERP podcast music was funky enough for Jim, so I have picked up a newer funkier edition in honor of his contribution. Final note: at the 5:00 minute mark, we talked about SAP's frequency of report updating. I did verify with SAP that the sustainability report will now be updated quarterly.

Podcast Highlights

1:05 Jim Spath - SCN sustainability Moderator - 20 years of experience in Environmental Engineering. Sustainability is a hobby for me, not part of my on-the-job duties, but I may be co-presenting with SAP on this topic at TechEd Berlin.

1:22 SAP sustainability report discussion: SAP has made an innovative, interactive online sustainability report. Jon: SAP has come a long way in a few iterations. Seems like it was just yesterday Tom Raftery was giving SAP a hard time about their previous PDF based report. SAP has come a long way, but there is much still to do. Jim: SAP is using BusinessObjects framework to make data available to outside users. I want to see their methodology for doing that. I see it as a cookbook for other kinds of BusinessObjects reporting. SAP has gotten better at automating the data collection on

the back end of the report. I'd like to see more about how SAP verifies its own sustainability data.

5:00 Jon: SAP is now updating the report quarterly. I would like to see the media calls on sustainability be more interactive. Jim: Jeremiah Stone of SAP has engaged with the SAP Mentors. It was a very lively debate.

7:15 Sustainability on SCN discussion: Jim: the SCN sustainability forum has had very low traffic. It can't just be SAP posting news, it has to be a community dialogue. There are more blogs on sustainability, which go all over the map on a wide range of topics, from SAP topics to political debates. The blog category can go off on tangents. Jim to Jon: mostly the talk has been in the SAP Business Process Expert community - how does the technology get bridged?

Jon: there are two aspects of that: first, how do you get community members involved? Business-driven discussions on SCN are harder to foster than the technical oriented discussions. With sustainability, you're trying to build momentum but there are a range of topic areas: from data collection to virtualization to lean coding practices for developers. On the functional side, there is environment health and safety and sustainability reporting, and then there is building a business case. There are a lot of different pieces, and how do you centralize that discussion?

Jim: regarding Enterprise Performance Management and virtualization, on SAP's Enterprise Performance Management forum on SCN, some of the posters on SCN don't seem to look at the issue from a company performance standpoint. The green IT forum has some of the same issues. As far as EHS, those are issues that go back to core government-mandated health and safety regulations that must be followed by companies. That's cut and dried for companies, but how do you move beyond compliance? SAP has set a standard to reduce their carbon emissions to what it was ten years ago. Tom Raftery jumped on that and wanted SAP to go even further - but companies still need to set those standards.

15:58 SAP Sustainability career discussion: Jim to Jon: What should SAP pros be doing for SAP sustainability career development? Jon: two approaches: 1. How can I push this along within my organization? 2. Individual skills development: even if my company isn't moving aggressively, how can I take it upon myself to do more? One of my skills themes for the year: "the greening of SAP skills." While the SAP sustainability product line may not yet be mature, there are still plenty of ongoing SAP-related projects that have a sustainability dimension and a bottom line impact. Getting involved with this work can have an impact on a resume, and give you a sense of purpose in your work. To be more closely connected to sustainability can add a little "skip to the step" on days where meaning is hard to find. But for individuals, you have to then map your own aspirations into SAP's sustainability roadmap.

18:16 Jim to Jon: SAP has started with their classic apps, then they have BusinessObjects dashboards and Carbon Impact. Are these unified tools or a product suite? Are there opportunities there? If you're in the chemicals industry, should you be focusing in a particular direction with these tools versus other industries? Is there an integrated vision? You have local, state and national regulations. Then you have international law. How can these things be fully integrated? What are the specifics for a career path?

Jon: examining your industry trends is important. Understanding compliance is important, but also what companies are doing to move beyond compliance. The more you have in-depth industry expertise and connect it to sustainability, the more impact you are going to have and the more formal your roles will be. Part of it is also understanding the tools. A suite of products can have its pros and cons for companies, right now, SAP doesn't have an integrated suite of sustainability apps. Look at it from where you are within SAP: developers: lean and green coding, sustainability reporting.

System admins: virtualization, system performance. On the functional side, EHS, SAP MII (improved shop visibility) - anytime when you're talking about increasing visibility and monitoring energy usage and system downtime, you're hitting on some of the green themes. An MM/PP person would find MII right up their wheelhouse. This involved on-the-job exploration and also homework on your own time. You have to take the extra effort - forums, webinars. Take a broader look at sustainability issues and then hone in.

Jim: focusing on emissions has motivated me to switch from general utilities to wind-supplied energy at home as an alternate source. Focus on energy usage goes to a company's bottom line, and it also speaks to your personal footprint and to your wallet for your bills. The energy topic in the SAP space is out there, they have a "What's your carbon impact" app on Facebook. SAP is making efforts in that space. From a data center perspective, or code more efficiently, the energy impact would be reduced. This fall I should be at the TechEd in Berlin, and I'm talking to SAP about possibly co-presenting on energy and sustainability topics - including the move toward server consolidation, toward data center consolidation, towards virtualization and running more and more applications on the same type of hardware. As systems get refreshed, and new generations come out, they are more powerful per watt, but do people benchmark them from an SAP systems capacity standpoint? SAP should be able to assist there. Reducing these impacts can be a differentiator for companies. For SAP MII, as systems get refreshed, companies are looking for more efficiency and MII plays a role here.

28:00 Jon: I would throw down the challenge that no matter where your skills are within SAP, there is a connection to SAP. Another example: if you're in SAP logistics, better transportation management can have a big sustainability impact. That's a very different attitude than waiting for SAP's sustainability products like Carbon Impact to mature - and get more customer traction - before getting involved. Those new generation sustainability gigs are going to come, but in the meantime there are plenty of opportunities to pursue.

29:15 Podcast wrap: Jim: Let's talk about some weak spots - areas that need work. SAP Mentors have talked with SAP about sustainability - I don't see it as a big draw currently because it's not part of their core focus but that's going to grow. I think you'll see a lot more on sustainability at TechEd as well.

30:00 Jon: SAP does have a clear and deep corporate commitment to that and I don't want to minimize that. Engaging the Mentors is important and I want that dialogue to continue. If it's an occasional thing, then I don't think it will work as well. The Mentors can push this conversation in a way that has appeal on the ground. When the conversation is just about marketing solutions, it doesn't always carry as well or have the same appeal. Fostering honest dialogue really gets people involved.

33:00 Jim: Hopefully next year SAP will stop blocking the bicycle taxis from SAPPHIRENOW Orlando!