SAP Certification:
A Fresh Perspective

A White Paper with criticism, suggestions and ideas from the "Certification Five"

The "certification five" are a project team of five SAP Mentors who have undertaken a dialogue with SAP Education in an effort to bring SAP certification in line with the expectations of SAP customers and SAP professionals who seek a standard of professional excellence.

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March 20 update: *As of this version of the white paper, the authors of this paper have included the responses of Sue Martin, Global Certification Portfolio Manager at SAP, into the white paper. Sue's comments appear in blue font after a number of sections in the paper, including the Synopsis and most of the "Recommendations for Improving Certification" chapters.*

January – March 2010

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1. Synopsis

As the professional validation of the largest provider of enterprise software in the world, SAP Certification should be synonymous with professional competence. Sadly, its value is regarded as minimal at best and irrelevant at worst.

SAP Mentors consider this topic central to the value SAP wishes to see itself as delivering to its customers. In recent months, a closer dialogue between SAP Mentors and SAP Education has brought about some meaningful collaboration, but it has also lit a spotlight on some major problems with SAP certification that have not yet been addressed. In this collaborative white paper, five SAP Mentors have come together to discuss and articulate their experiences as practitioners, collaborators, and analysts. This paper is the outcome of those discussions. SAP Mentors are considered by SAP as being among the 'best of the best.' They are selected as Mentors for their multi-disciplinary skills. Therefore their considered opinion should matter to SAP.

The authors of this paper do not agree on all our viewpoints, but we are united in our desire to see certification develop a new level of prestige in the SAP community. When SAP certification becomes a standard-bearer of skills quality, SAP will benefit on many levels. But in order to reach this level, a number of bold and innovative steps are needed. This paper lays the groundwork for those steps with an analysis of the existing problems, views from the field, and a series of specific recommendations based on our conversations with SAP Education, SAP users, and our peers in the SAP Mentor community.

Background

1. SAP software is broadly regarded as the most comprehensive software of its kind anywhere in the world.

2. Implementing SAP software is not trivial, requiring a level of skill that demands significant training.

3. SAP certification is sometimes perceived as the pathway to a solid career as a software implementer/consultant. _However, a closer look at job board statistics and the viewpoints of SAP customers indicates that SAP certification is rarely a key factor in job orders or hiring decisions in the SAP user community._

4. Until the recent rollout of the three tiered certification levels (Associate, Professional, and the as yet unavailable Master level), SAP certification has remained largely unchanged over many years. Given that SAP is changing its emphasis away from pure code construction to business process, now is a good time to assess the value that SAP Certification delivers and ensure that Certification validates the skills that SAP customers truly need.

5. The SAP ecosystem is outside of SAP Education's direct control, adding to the challenge of enforcing quality and certification standards. Some SIs offer good quality education that turns out people well suited to implementation. Many do not.

6. There are deep concerns in the SAP Mentor community about the lack of field experience validation in the current SAP certification curriculum, particularly at the Professional and Master levels.

7. Publicly aired implementation failures imply at least a level of technical incompetence that should never be part of the implementation equation. That in turn casts doubt on the value of SAP Certification as currently articulated. Though some inside SAP Education limit their view of SAP certification to technical skills competence, many inside SAP, including former CEO Leo Apotheker, have raised the bar, equating SAP certification with consultant quality itself. If that is to become reality, there is a great deal of work to be done.

8. Practical experience of the certification process by SAP Mentors indicates an inconsistency of expectation among candidates, flaws with the questions asks pertaining to knowledge validation, and a rudimentary approach to certification examination preparation.

9. The multiple choice question format proposed through all levels is problematic. Although SAP Mentors do not have a consensus on the effectiveness of multiple choice at the Associates level, there is a near-consensus that at the Professional and Master levels, SAP should be testing skills that are currently absent from the curriculum and doing it in a different format beyond multiple choice.

10. SAP software is both mature and innovative. SAP Certification does not take that reality into account, and seems to lag significantly behind SAP itself when it comes to new functionality education, and in particular, dismantling educational silos and creating process-driven ERP know-how.

Going Forward

1. SAP is in operation by more than 80,000 businesses. It is part of the fabric of Global 2000 businesses. Even so, there is no coherent approach to training, education and certification. That represents both a challenge and an opportunity.

2. SAP Certification should mean something. Moving forward, the authors of this paper are of the view that at the very least, SAP Certified personnel should know they have crossed a significant barrier to understanding enterprise software. At the higher levels, they should consider themselves as having demonstrated levels of skill that are genuinely recognized in the market in exactly the same way that other professionals such as lawyers, doctors, engineers, architects and accountants are recognized. In this regard, Cisco Certification serves as a benchmark that might be considered as a template for SAP to consider, especially at the higher levels. The end goal for SAP certification would be for SAP to become recognized as a trade, with certification being the validator of the skills needed to be a top shelf professional in that vocation. However, regardless of what shape certification may take in the future, there is a general consensus that there needs to be a strong practical component to the Professional and Master levels. The exact shape of this component will likely be subject to much discussion. Even so, the authors are of the belief that such a component will not only enhance value, but complement the move towards more business process oriented styles of implementation.

3. SAP software is now at a level of complexity and maturity that demands a different approach, one that recognizes the professionalism required to render a good implementation of which all SAP business partners can be proud.

Opportunities and Challenges

1. The authors of this paper are keenly aware that the questions raised in this paper are far from easy to resolve given the current state of SAP Certification. We have left many obvious and not so obvious questions unanswered in anticipation that further discussion in the broader community will provide fresh insights into how best SAP Certification may be taken forward and will expose those issues of greatest concern.

2. At the same time, the authors believe that a radical re-appraisal and assessment of what it means to be SAP Certified will not only benefit SAP professionals, but will differentiate SAP in the highly competitive enterprise software market.

3. Proposed enhancements and improvements to SAP Certification have largely been leveled at the current certification regime because it is not possible in a paper of this length to consider how the certification system might change once others have provided feedback.

4. Nothing the authors propose should have a negative impact on SAP revenue. If anything, the proposed enhanced status of SAP Certification should allow SAP to enjoy increased revenue in the certain knowledge that it is delivering real value back to the marketplace that will be understood and applauded.

5. Making any form of transition from the status quo will not be easy. The authors have many further ideas about how this might be managed, but have chosen not to articulate those in this paper because without SAP acceptance of the general tenor of this paper, authors thoughts will not be valued.

Organization

This document is organized to reflect both the collective thinking of the group and the individual experiences of its authors in three broad topic areas:

- Current State of SAP Certification - Analysis

- Recommendations for Improving Certification

- Appendixes

Where individuals have specific points of view that differ from the consensus, these are specifically noted at the end of the appropriate page or section. This paper was largely written as "one voice," with agreements hashed out amongst the five co-authors. However, with our different SAP backgrounds and perspectives, it also makes sense to present some content in our own individual voices. Therefore, section B of part I, "Current State of Conversation," each of us has a chapter or two in our own voice. All other sections of this paper are written in one voice, with variations on views noted where applicable.

SAP's Response:
This largely reflects the findings of the review conducted by SAP Education in 2006/2007. On the basis of these findings a revamp of SAP's Global Certification Program was initiated. The transformation project encompassed the following changes:
The surveys conducted showed that the certification program was largely considered to be a "new hire" qualification and that a qualification for more experienced individuals was needed. This led to the launch of the Professional level certifications, targeted at validating project experience for individuals with 4+ years of experience.
Introducing job task profiles (which are thoroughly validated internally and externally) to shift the focus of the certification exams from knowledge-based questions on product functions and features to a job-task orientation focusing

clearly on whether a certified individual can apply the skills learned (at Associate level) or gained by experience (at Professional level) in mission critical areas to contribute positively to customer success.

Significant changes to the exam design, production and validation processes helped SAP to introduce best of breed industry standard processes to ensure a much higher level of validity within the exams. These measures include group workshops for exam development with much higher involvement from practitioners with real life project experience rather than solely instructors, standard setting processes to identify the valid cut score and a shift of exam question writing techniques to test application of skills rather than knowledge recall.

The exams were traditionally primarily available with instructor led training but this has been shifted to provide improved accessibility, taking into account that there are a variety of ways in which test takers can prepare for exams – e-learning, workshops, study groups or on the job practice. Decoupling the exam process from the classroom by offering 4,000 additional third party test center testing opportunities allows test takers to certify with minimum time and travel investment regardless of their choice of preparation.

In the past one of the key factors hindering the acceptance of the certification was SAP's own lack of commitment to the certification program. This meant that a relatively small proportion of our own consultants were certified. SAP has addressed this 2008/2009 and was able to reach a goal of having 80% of our own consultants worldwide certified by the end of 2009.

The last year has been a challenge with the economic crisis touching all parts of the business but it has had its positive aspects. Firstly, it showed with such clarity how important our revision and changes to the certification program have been in supporting SAP's customer investments in such a high-risk environment.

Luckily SAP Education started these changes three years ago – but this White Paper is correct in its synopsis– SAP still does have some changes to make and is battling with legacy perception on the market. 2010 needs to be the year for that to change that and coming into the year with 80% of consultants certified puts SAP in a much stronger position to do so.

 Necessity also helped SAP to accelerate priorities in terms of skill enablement. Tight travel and training budgets accelerated the move for more remote and cost-efficient training methods, significantly reducing any market acceptance issues. The White Paper highlights the need for SAP Education to become more flexible and cost-effective. This has been shown this in the past year with the rollout of e-Learning, eAcademies and Virtual Live Classrooms at an accelerated pace and there is an ambitious plan for much more progress in this area in the next two years. In fact SAP Education has defined KPIs for every single region to move the needle towards non-traditional classroom training (NTCT). In the US alone more than 20 percent of SAP's training was delivered virtually in 2009. In addition, SAP created a self-serve Learning on Demand web presence which it will continue to build on and which allows anyone to take our courses with credit card payment options. Finally, one of the key innovations from our 2009 transformation program was to create a customer learning map which allows customers to plan an end to end SAP

learning environment that covers a lot more than project team training and moves into the areas of end user training, gaming, needs assessments and sets measurable ROI to the education plan. SAP Education looks forward to reaching the same level of collaboration with the SAP Mentors that has proved so useful with the certification program.

From an SAP Education perspective there are a few key points around the synopsis.

1. There needs to be a clearer differentiation in the discussion around the goals of the certification program. Yes, SAP does endorse certification at the highest level but does NOT consider it to be the sole benchmark for customers. The messaging needs to be very clear on this. Certification is one of several competitive advantages an individual or partner company can offer to a customer. Others will include project experience, customer references, communications skills, etc. It is not SAP's expectation that certification will be the sole deciding factor. However it is SAP's responsibility to our customers to ensure that we have a valid, reliable and objective certification program in place which is dependable.

2. There needs to be a clearer differentiation between the different levels of certification, their target audiences and their objectives.

Associate certification - is aimed at test takers in the first year of their SAP career. Our major objective for this level is to assess that a test taker has learnt the tasks necessary to be able to contribute to the success of their initial (mentored) projects. The major enhancements which we have introduced there are:

- Thoroughly validated job task profiles as the basis for certification with focus on critical and frequent tasks to be performed
- Shift from 100% knowledge recall questions (which can be learnt from the book) to 60% application of knowledge and understanding questions
- Shift of scoring model from partial scoring of multiple response questions to dichotomous scoring - either you know all the correct answers or you lose the whole point for the question. No guesswork allowed.

MCQs are still the most objective and reliable way of testing at this level and, with the changes listed above, psychometric experts have advised us that this is the fairest method at this level.   This is also the area where customers have the least knowledge about a potential consultant as reference and project experience may be at a minimum.

Professional certification - is aimed at test takers with roughly 4-7 years of SAP experience. Our major objective for this level is to assess that a test taker has learnt the tasks necessary to be able to contribute independently to the success of their projects. The major enhancements which we have introduced there are:

- Thoroughly validated job task profiles as the basis for certification with focus on critical and frequent tasks to be performed
- Emphasis on how to conceptualize, blueprint, modify, and optimize integrated solutions and processes (40%) and how to build, implement, configure, model, and troubleshoot (40%)

SAP can more readily understand the concerns about the adequacy of MCQs for testing at this level and this concern seems greater in the Technology and Development areas compared to Application areas. We did investigate performance based testing methods for this a couple of years ago but found that it would be an extremely complex challenge to test fairly based on the diverse nature of SAP software.

We would like to think that this is something that we could pilot in the future but our testing experts advise us to gain more experience with the Professional level and gather historic data as a basis before embarking on the next phase.

Master certification – Our stakeholder survey last year showed us that we are definitely on the right track with our proposal for the Master certification. Our concern currently is that this program would have to have 100% commitment from all stakeholder groups and we still have to further the groundwork for getting that commitment in order for that to be a success.

As the White paper correctly identifies SAP needs to have some strong customer data supporting the certification argument in place. Now that the necessary changes have been implemented in the certification program it will be a significant focus for SAP in 2010 to work together with partners and customers to measure tangible success.

There are still some significant changes which need to be made - and the Mentor Community has already helped SAP Education in 2009 in identifying priorities for 2010.

2. SAP Certification - Introducing the Issues

Certification as defined by Wikipedia : **Certification** refers to the confirmation of certain characteristics of an object, person, or organization. This confirmation is often, but not always, provided by some form of external review, education, or assessment. One of the most common types of certification in modern society is professional certification , where a person is certified as being able to competently complete a job or task, usually by the passing of an examination.

Throughout recent blogging activities and questioning, the certification question was once more raised. Some of us, part of the SAP environment have gathered to debate this crucial topic. We have summarized our views and findings on the Certification. Martin also includes over 9 years of consulting and training activities, during which lots of certification queries were raised such as :

- Should I be certified?

- What is the right timing?

- Should I rather hire certified consultants?

- Should I go through the standard training track?

- What is the added value when becoming SAP certified?

- What are the challenges when going trough the hassle of certification process?

- Do you have any sample questions?

- How do I convince my boss to pay for it?

So many questions that we will try to cover and kick off a beginning of an answer in this white paper.

We first analyze the current state of the certification. We refresh everyone's memory about the certification definition. (add here Job profile, mentor conversations etc)
 Next we highlight issues from Martin's three experiences learned in the field while going through 4 certification exams.
 Based on this background information, we put up front fact and figures regarding the certification.
 Last we shortlist key ideas that we feel should be discussed with other peers in order to check whether or not they are doable but most important would make sense in the certification review process.
 This white paper is all yours, we welcome your feedback, we don't have the wisdom nor the answers to all questions raised here. Therefore we challenge you to get onboard the discussion panel and provide further ideas and remarks.

From Certification to a Three-Tiered Program

Certification feedback

Improve the communication channel. Nothing is more frustrating than leaving the room with no feedback at all. This was an early feature of what is now the Associate level certification examination.

Positive evolution so far

Since 1997, there has been a positive evolution:

Transfer of Certification

The certification is now following the individual rather than the company, which is what I would expect. Do we become less knowledgeable when moving to another employer or company ?

Certification levels

Like the enhancement package 'Innovation without disruption', SAP has recently split the certification initiative in three well identified certification tracks. Each certification track has a distinctive logo that each individual can, once certified, proudly add on his professional résumé.

SAP distinguishes three types of certifications:

1. **SAP Certified Master** "requires demonstrated expertise regarding specific aspects of SAP software functionality and technology, as well as the ability to drive innovation and solution optimization that meet an organization's technical and business requirements".

2. **SAP Certified Professional** "requires proven project experience, business process knowledge, and a more detailed understanding of SAP solutions".

3. **SAP Certified Associate** "requires fundamental knowledge of SAP solutions and the successful acquisition of broad proficiency".

Other recent certification improvements

SAP has made other improvements in SAP certification in the last two years that are important steps in the right direction:

1. **Job profile based testing are superior to previous incarnations of SAP certification.** Restructuring the SAP certification curriculum around SAP job roles was a good step towards a more practical, project-accountable approach to SAP certification. In the past, SAP certification measured broad SAP module knowledge without honing in on the functionality needed to perform particular job functions. The more job-focused SAP certification becomes, the more relevant it will become to SAP hiring managers.

2. **Dialogue with SAP Mentors has led to awareness of certain problems (e.g. lack of customer data), some of which are being addressed.** Earlier this year, SAP Education made a pro-active move to engage in structured discussions with SAP Mentors around the state of SAP certification and how it could be improved. These conversations have led to productive exchanges and the involvement with some SAP Mentors in curriculum exam feedback. Future webinars with SAP Education are in the works. Communication threads have not always been consistent, but the two way conversation has value for all parties and for SAP as a whole. More recently, SAP's Learning on Demand (LOD) team has launched their web site and also engaged the Mentors in a consistent feedback loop.

3. **Emphasis of BPX curriculum with SAP's own consultants and partners is an encouraging step to overcome silo-based testing limitations.** One of the biggest limitations of SAP's educational curriculum is that is lacks the process-oriented focus SAP itself is emphasizing from ERP 6.0 forward. SAP's BPX certification program is a positive step towards addressing this problem. BPX certification, properly developed and extended into the consultant and user communities, also has the potential to "round out" SAP professionals who may have flaws that traditional "body of knowledge" certification testing cannot identify.

4. **These improvements are encouraging, but represent steps along the way to a more effective certification program**. We will examine these progress points in more detail in this white paper, and also point out the obstacles that must be overcome before these improvements reach their full potential.

Poor skills lead to under-utilized implementations

Lack of education (and certification) becomes most significant if one looks at levels of SAP feature utilization. Many customers have little experience what their current or the next SAP ERP release is capable of delivering. In some cases customers implemented 3.x and then upgraded to 4.6x or ECC 5/6 without any knowledge of the benefits those upgrades might bring. More often than not, upgrades are seen as a necessary evil in order to avoid increased support charges. Customizations are carried over into the new release without questioning whether these are still required, have become obsolete or could be improved where new system features might offer better alternatives. Often old development tools are still being used because there seems to be no point in using the new ones.

This is partially down to individual level of investment and drive for change. Education and training could play a significant role in improving this situation. Whilst standard training courses cover the basics, certifications might help encourage centers of excellence and a better insight into what new system releases can bring.

Consulting partners might perceive too much customer knowledge as a business risk, as the assumption might be that "more customer knowledge means less consulting business". However, this approach is outdated and not sustainable. A push for better skilled, educated and (possibly) certified professionals on both the customer and consulting partner parts of the equation is required in order to unlock the potential of SAP systems. This would be a win-win-win. Better educated customers make smarter decisions for their business. In tandem with skilled consulting partners they can create better and collaborative business relationships that reap value that truly represents 2+2=5.

In our opinion, education and by implication certification, can serve as a strong lever for making this vision a reality.

SAP comment
Absolutely agree. This is in everyone's best interests and this is the whole point of the transformation - not as implied earlier in the White Paper as a way to increasing certification revenue.

Understanding the current status of certification..

When discussing SAP Certification it is important to understand what brought it to its current state.

SAP has been introducing new technologies in the market for many years, but in the early days where skilled resources were hard to find, it was important to validate the people that had the basics from the ones that just knew how to pronounce S-A-P..

SAP Certification was born to address basic SAP knowledge. The goal was to verify someone's knowledge against predefined curricula. Again, that was important because even after 4-6 weeks of academy training, some people were still not able to "get it".

In the case of functional resources, there were functional module academies, followed by certification exams. SD, MM and other modules are examples. From a technical point of view, the certification in ABAP, for example, was there to validate the knowledge given during the 6 week ABAP academy. That was all.

This format worked at the beginning since a certification for someone that was junior out-of-academy meant something. Until recently, if we were looking to hire someone without experience but that followed the academy, getting someone certified probably guaranteed a level of quality that was at least better than no certification at all.

But that is when the problems started for the SAP Certification program; people started to get experience and become specialized. The SAP Certification program did not follow this trend. It remained rooted in the idea of academic curricula. That is not aligned to today's requirements. The result is that over time, certification has lost value, SAP professionals and employers don't care about it to the extent that it informs hiring decisions or contributes to the notion of centers of excellence, a key component in SAP's ecosystem and customer development strategy.

SAP has adopted and is starting to implement a 3 tier certification process. In theory, that should better address the issues of skilled/experienced professionals, but requires significant improvement. the Master level remains largely undefined though the notion of multiple choice questions dominates the way SAP Certification examinations are constructed. While there is a place for MCQ, it is only a small part of what we believe should be the total SAP Certification equation.

The main discussion on the new two levels of certification is around the following:

1. **Technical Content**; Which areas should SAP certify? Should it be more specialized or more cross-functional? Is SD Professional a relevant certification level today?

2. **Method**; How can you effectively certify knowledge and experience for Professional and Master Levels? Associate and the old certification program were based on multiple choice exams. Is this the best way to do it? As experience translates into deeper technical knowledge how can you validate those acquired skills?

3. **Scope**; Should SAP certification include other very important skills necessary for a SAP professional to well perform its job? In this area we might include business background, problem solving skills, communication, interaction with other team players, etc.

For the time being, the focus of this exercise should be limited to #1 and 2. In our opinion, SAP has not been able to properly certify technical knowledge. It is imperative that SAP concentrates effort to make certification work at one clearly defined level: How can SAP properly certify the different levels of experience in different SAP technical areas?

SAP executives have said that they are working on developing a certification process that will guarantee quality in the market. It is a bold statement but open to different interpretations. Guaranteeing that resources know the different SAP products (at different skill levels) is enough to start guaranteeing quality, on which the old formula has fallen short.

Note: Leonardo has a specific position regarding the overall scope of SAP Certification as follows:
 I have a strong opposition to having a method that tries to address more than that, changing the scope to a formula supposed to "address it all". That is utopian and unrealistic. I cannot imagine a proper and credible way to certify intelligence and people skills. Should we try to certify the accounting knowledge a FI resource has? It is surely relevant, critical we should say, but out of scope. In short, I find any attempt to go beyond SAP content a waste of time/effort.

> SAP comment
> SAP Education absolutely agrees with Leo's opinion. This is not the point of the certification.

3. Current State of Conversation: Dialogue and Mentor Data

Michael Koch's SAP Certification Survey - Lessons Learned

A survey focusing on SAP freelance consultants held during March 2009 provided interesting results on this particular part of the SAP community. Generally, SAP Freelancers can be characterized as very experienced, highly specialized and flexible in terms of market demands, which makes them an interesting sample group (also, because most freelancers have to fund SAP education themselves!).

Key findings were:

- large percentage of contractors in survey were certified

- inexperienced consultants value certification more than experienced ones

- most of participant's SAP co-workers are not certified

- no push in the market (yet) demanding certifications

- SAP's new 3-tier approach move into right direction

The survey also tried to establish what SAP Education could do in order to entice more consultants to become certified. Main points here were:

- interest could be higher if experience would be acknowledged

- preference for self-study and tutorials (SDN Subscription etc) in order to keep costs down

- SAP Certification (Spring) Board for contractors - idea similar to the soon-to-be announced "SAP Career Center"

On the whole SAP has made a first right step into a better future regarding certification. However a lot more lies ahead and needs to be done. Historically, there is a lot of skepticism in the SAP community as far as certification is concerned. It takes more than just the announcement of a 3-tier system to overcome this.

'Lessons Learned from the Field' - Key Highlights from Personal Testing Experience by Martin Gillet

Throughout my learning I have been through the certification process five times. I have been certified three times in the field of SAP Human Resources, known today as Human Capital Management (HCM). I failed twice: I was unable to pass the Portal certification and also failed the last SAP HCM certification ERP6.0 (formerly known as ECC6.0 or my SAPERP2005).

Round 1 – Certification on release 4.0 (Paris, France - December 3rd, 1999)

Facts

I started my career back in late 1997. Right from the outset my employer made it clear that I was expected to pass SAP certification. It was marked as a mandatory objective in my performance review.

I spent many nights and days trying to figure out how the system works and for those who remember, getting the best of the Personnel Administration and Development print files. I passed the first test.

Learnings from first certification

- There was no tutor in the room. After studying all that hard, feeling I was passing one more major exam from University, no one was there to secure the certification process as everything was done online. It seemed to me that those consultants with less honorable intentions could easily work around the system. I trust the certification should be monitored closely.

- Get me my results! I have to wait several weeks to get my results ? No way ! It was frustrating. Why would I have to wait to find out the results as this is a math algorithm?

- Provide me detailed results, please! Most of us in High School expect to receive a grade: A, B etc. Why didn't they provide a percentage achieved or a grade ? This lack of information was frustrating.

- Setting tomorrow's objectives. I came, I studied, I passed. But couldn't we have a full debriefing to check areas of weakness?. Shouldn't the certification also show me how to reinforce my SAP knowledge. For example, should I not know when I will need to pass the new release certification? This would maintain learners' attention as well as focus on motivation.

Round 2 – Certification on release 4.70 (R/3 enterprise) (Brussels, Belgium - June 18th, 2004)

Facts

Learnings from second certification

- A tutor was in the room

- Get me my results ! Wish granted. I received the percentage achieved online.

- Point from Round 1 about new learnings were still applicable, even in 2004!

Round 3 – Certification on SAP Enterprise Portal (EP) in 2005

Facts

I enrolled for a 10 days portal training courses, which was covering all aspects of the SAP Enterprise Portal plus providing access to the portal certification as these two courses were the pre-requisites to gain access to SEP. The first day we had a knowledgeable trainer and I felt the knowledge transfer process had started well. But to our great discomfort, the next morning, our dedicated tutor was sent out to a customer. We never heard from him again and were stuck for the remainder of the course with what I can only describe as a rookie trainer. We reviewed the training manual on a step by step basis. That was a boring exercise that only demonstrated and ability to read. We identified dozen of snapshots illustrating the portal setup, once install CD is pushed back, click on next, then next ... then next (15th times). We had no time to review anything once the course concluded and we jumped into the certification right away. I had 69%, so according to SAP's standard I failed. I complained to SAP. I got a rain check for another course but never managed the time to find the time and use it.

Learnings from third certification

- A tutor was in the room

- Trainer was not as expected almost no knowledge transfer was undertaken

- Never attempt to pass certification directly after a course; take time to review material

Round 4 and 5 – Certification on release ERP 6.0 (formerly know as ECC6.0 or mySAP ERP 2005) (Zürich, Switzerland - October 27th, 2006)

Facts

Working on behalf of SAP, the education team sponsored my latest certification. I was motivated but like many of us in these hectic times didn't take the time to read and study the certification material. So I settled down to pass the certification with a colleague. Having taught multiple times the pre-requisites course for certification, I reviewed the documentation and mainly focused my attention on new functionalities provided in the Delta Course. I felt certification was too technical. SAP notified me quickly internally. The first time, I achieved 69% percent so according to SAP's standard I failed. I was very disappointed. SAP provided me a list of courses I should attend, which made the situation even stranger. Indeed, most courses I was supposed to attend were courses I was training on behalf of SAP. According to the feedback, I failed since I was not good at naming all cycles and payroll schemas.. So I learned my lesson, studied it all by rote and passed the certification successfully the second time.

Learnings from this fourth certification

- A tutor was in the room

- Certification hasn't changed and I felt I was once more throwing time away

- Learning material by rote doesn't make any sense

- As silly as it sounds, Points from section Round 1 (b) (c) were back in the picture.

- Point from section Round 1 (d) was still applicable,

Round 6 – Certification Talent Management 2009

Now that the new certification tracks are available, SAP suggested I pass the Talent Management Certification. Seeing the list of pre-requisites, I'm not concerned but I'm lacking time to go over technical requirements. I have set a 'todo' on my list with low priority.

Concluding thoughts

I have described my certification expertise and experience from the field, from junior to senior consultant.

We have been through key facts and concerns that should challenge your reflection of how SAP should adapt the certification process.

I have done my best to point up objectively the situation from my first contact with certification in 1998 up to today's situation, the 'as is' certification process. I'm aware that I might not have a full view on the matter but nonetheless, my fellow SAP communities, peers, colleagues and myself have started a discussion that we challenge you to join and consider and/or provide more topics into the debate.
 I'd like to review some of the questions raised in the introduction and provide an answer or beginning of an answer:

- **Should I be certified ?** The answer should be an obvious "Yes." SAP engineers/consultants should seriously consider certification although it is not mandatory. Today, certification is more honorary than confirming a person's SAP skills.

- **What is the right timing ?** I would calm down major companies (revision of partnering conditions with SAP to be reviewed as well as they put pressure on third party firms to get a fair amount of certified consultants. The right time should be inserted in each person (business analyst, consultant etc) Personnel Development Plan (PDP). Furthermore, it should be defined with the person and not be set as a mandatory step. I'd say the right time for new hires should be around a minimum of two years of expertise with 2 or 3 projects.

- **Should I hire certified consultants ?** The fact that a consultant is certified is unfortunately not evidence of know-how nor knowledge. That can change.

- **Should I go through the standard training track ?** You don't 'have to' but it would make sense to be trained at the source, by recognized SAP professionals. I have welcomed all initiative to setup 'SAP academy', instead of the full learning curriculum. Now also take into account your learning progress, some of use can't digest 25 days of academy, they would rather set milestones by attending separately each standard course throughout a pre defined period, to ease the knowledge transfer.

- **What is the added value when becoming SAP certified ?** I trust it is a Honorary recognition amongst SAP and SAP colleagues. Also, you would have access to the SAP web platform.

- **What are the challenges when going trough the hassle of certification process ?** The main challenge will be to digest all the information you must know, in every part and in the correct order. I would say don't rush, take it slowly and learn step by step.

- **Do you have any sample questions** ? No, besides few questions I recall from the exam, to my knowledge, SAP does not provide an online a 'checklist' with sample questions. I have seen some books regarding the certification but I found the sample questions to be so basic that I would rather check all available websites available out there (SDB, IT Toolbox etc) where users are compiling unofficial questions. It would be a good start. SAP Certification team could provide some official samples.

- **How do I convince my boss to pay for it ?** In today's economy, most of our bosses don't want to pay extra bonuses nor for training activities. As underlined earlier, the certification should be part of a Personnel Development Plan. (Most of) the positive arguments were illustrated throughout this white paper. That could change if SAP Certification became more 'professional.'

We have seen that there are plenty of ideas and remarks to consider. I look forward to discussing this with your and/or the SAP certification team.
  Also bear in mind the main bookmark regarding certification information :
http://www.sap.com/services/education/certification

Dennis Howlett's radical perspective

Much of the discussion around SAP certification, and by default education, centers around the idea that you can take the existing structure and improve it. While that may seem reasonable in principle, it doesn't address the fundamental problem that we see: the erosion in value of SAP certification. It doesn't go unnoticed that in the early SAP Mentor intakes, not a single person nominated for position as a Mentor was qualified in anything SAP related!

At the same time, we continue to see project failures hitting the headlines where it is clear the quality of implementer comes under scrutiny. That must pose questions about the experience and capability of those engaged on at least some SAP implementations.

During a recent call, we were asked to provide examples of best practice yet that is almost impossible. The large SIs run their own training programs they believe are adequate (sic), Indian SIs stress certification as a make weight to achieve credibility in the market, some German SIs employ a formal apprenticeship scheme involving structured training and on the job education and mentoring. Still others have set up very successful specialized SAP related shops based purely on the fact consultants all have x+ years' experience.

And all of this in the context of SAP wanting to improve value in the eco-system and the creation of excellence centers in the user community. Given the competing challenges and the fact SAP can say that 1.7 million registrants exist within SAP Communities the time has come to radically rethink what it means to be SAP Certified.

One proposal is to elevate SAP certification to the equivalent of a professional qualification that is recognized in the industry among SIs, customers, independent contractors and VARs. This is not meant to be a substitute for proven experience but a long term pre-requisite.

Many professions require evidence of certification before you can start working on certain types of job. You wouldn't for instance turn yourself over to the care of a general practitioner when you need open heart surgery. You cannot sign off on an audit unless you are an approved and accredited auditor. In the UK solicitors can instruct barristers but cannot appear before the bar unless they have taken bar exams. Even then you'd always want a specialist. One common feature in many professions is the need for post qualification continuing education. Given the way SAP has changed over the years, it seems hardly credible that a person certified in FI/CO back in 2000-1 could be considered appropriately qualified for today's solutions. Maintenance of professional status should therefore require a degree of ongoing, certified training and education. While this may lead to additional revenue streams for SAP, the primary purpose would be to ensure that all those who call themselves certified are understood to be maintaining a level of knowledge commensurate with the ongoing development of the SAP line of products. In other words that they are truly a trusted professional.

Clearly this is a huge topic and one that is bound to stir considerable debate. There are for instance no easy answers to transitioning to a 'new system' but it is something that all professions have to overcome at some point. A significant part of the problem lays in the fact there are plenty of great engineers and process experts who know SAP very well but whose understanding has been achieved through the acquisition of practical knowledge over many years. There are ways to recognize those skills and knowledge that would allow these highly competent people to pass through the door of certification without being subject to formal examination in the traditional sense.

For any profession to carry weight, its system of learning and examination has to carry value. Proposed changes to the system of examination will lend credence to the idea that SAP Certified has genuine meaning in the marketplace and is not just another way that SAP takes money from customers. In this person's view, at the very least, it changes what it means to be an IT professional in the broadest sense and is therefore an innovation from which SAP, its ecosystem partners, customers and the IT industry will benefit. the potential benefits are many. Examples include:

- Recognition among peers that your qualification demonstrated an accredited level of professional skill

- A leading indicator to clients that you are technically and practically competent

- Provide SIs with the ability to confidently put forward teams structured according to client needs and evidenced from the certifications the teams display

- Potentially, a reduction in time to value for SAP solutions by solution providers and SIs

- Keying in certification to a professional status should encourage SAP certified engineers of all kinds to continue their education as a way of differentiating the SAP offering and their ability to execute

- Relatively easy way to leverage LOD as an integral part of structuring PQE (Post Qualification Education) and encouraging the uptake of higher certification levels

Leonardo De Araujo: framing the issue: certification and training are different

I think we need to have disclaimers to make sure we all understand what we are discussing in this exercise.

First, it is about Certification and not about training/education. Surely they are very dependent, but our recommendations are here on what could be done to have a certification that is better and consequently more accepted. We can have some Education content and recommendation in here, but we need to distinguish it. Ex: Certification cost is not the same thing as Education cost.

When we discuss certification it is very important to define what is going to be certified. There are many skills required to make someone a good SAP professional. Here is a summary:

- SAP Skills

  - SAP Technical skills - Here is where we assess if the person knows the given topic in SAP. That could be a module or a technical component, like BW, ABAP, etc. These skills get deeper and more refined with field experience.

  - Project skills - Includes ASAP methodology knowledge

- Interpersonal skills - Communication, charisma (important for sales roles), collaboration, organization, time management, etc - these are the Soft skills

- Problem solving skills

As of today, SAP has the 3-level certification that might be fine for the Associate level. It evaluates a small set of SAP technical skills via Multiple Choice questions.

The question arises on what should be the scope of the Professional and Master levels (which skills) and the exam delivery method.

I believe that at the professional level, the validation of technical knowledge needs improvement. That is due to the technical content of the exams and its delivery method (MC questions).

Just to clarify (I think there is a lot of confusion here about this): Having a SAP certification exam with written questions about how to solve a real world example is not addressing problem solving skills, but yet it evaluates how technically the person would approach an issue and that fall into the TECHNICAL KNOWLEDGE.

I don't agree that we should add the other skills sets to this certification process. Interpersonal skills are very difficult to be evaluated correctly. Another point is why bother about these additional skills if the foundation of the certification (that is the technical knowledge) is not good enough and needs revision?

By the way I proposed an approach to improve the technical content of the exams by having it done in subsets.

The statement by whoever from SAP saying that SAP Certification will certify Quality is very subjective. I believe you have technical quality if you evaluate technical knowledge. That may not

be all we need, but is a very good start if done correctly (and it is very far from what there is today!). That is what I think we should focus on and what "they" may be referring to.

After all, which other certification goes beyond technical knowledge? None that I am aware of. For example: Accountants are verified on accounting principles and rules, nothing about people or problem solving skills."

Leonardo De Araujo: Reasons why SAP certification should reflect ONLY SAP related knowledge

Reasons why SAP certification should reflect ONLY SAP related knowledge

- **Soft skills are too hard to validate** - How can you assess problem solving skills? Team working? Communication? Surely we can teach and assess it, but it is a very hard undertaking. Additionally it is very hard to properly and effectively validate it.

- **Market Acceptance and value** - Certification will only be accepted by the community when both professionals and companies see a fit and value in the process. Currently professionals don't adopt it since it "is not applicable" to their skill set. Would it make easier to add all these soft kills to the pool? No way. It will only increase skepticism. As for Employers, even if SAP was to offer a way to assess communication and team work, they would surely still perform interviews and check for references, it kind of defeats the purpose. What can a 3 hrs test in a lab be more effective than 5 years of experience and good reference?

- **SAP competence** - this is driven by SAP and not only reduces the scope to a more manageable one, but also restricts to the competence of SAP.

- **Cost** - Here I don't talk about training. It is only about the exam. How much would it add to the process to change from a 3 hr exam (that you have to prepare anyway, adding countless hours) to a many-day ordeal (maybe even weeks) to properly address each of the soft skills areas (3 hrs for a team working lab? 3 hrs for communication? Problem solving?). And all this is not even addressing the most important point. Today SAP is pushing for it, but may not be implementing any process to make its own SAP employees adopt it. They ask them to get certified, but the time spent for the exam and training is out of their own pockets and greatly affects their bonus (loss in chargeability). So, if even companies like SAP have a hard time swallowing the pill "getting on board" with it, with a short certification process, imagine we said to them now it is a week for the testing alone?

What is what I refer to here as "SAP related knowledge" anyway?
  Often we hear that we'd like to certify experience. wow that is a nice statement, but what does it mean? Problem solving skills? Literally that is not the case. If it refers on real world scenarios on how to solve a real SAP problem, that assesses your technical knowledge. The more experience you have the more you will be comfortable with finding a solution. Now how to perform this validation (MC question or interview, or whatever) then, it is another discussion and that belongs to "method" of certification.

Jon Reed's views on SAP certification: highlights from past writings

Jon Reed has written extensively on the state of SAP certification over the years (see Appendix for article links). For the purposes of this paper, Jon selected a few key comments that he thinks will help to frame the current discussion:

On certification and consultant quality: "In my view, the biggest weakness of the traditional SAP consultant is that the technical folks tended to lack "big picture" business skills and awareness, and the functional folks tended to work in "configuration silos" without a broader view of the business process or a deeper technical know-how. The premium consultants were not like this, but there were never enough of those to go around. Since SAP certification never claimed to measure these consulting qualities, I don't tend to see SAP certification as a cure all for SAP project woes today. Having said that, I have always hoped that SAP certification could reach the point where customers trusted SAP certified consultants enough to use it as a benchmark of quality."

How BPX certification can help to address the "quality problem": "The description I made of the flaws in the traditional technical or functional consultant is directly addressed in the BPX certification curriculum. Therefore, I see the BPX certification as especially important, as it is a means of formalizing the crucial areas that both technical and functional consultants can work to improve. And it would be a great certification for a younger professional, with a few years of SAP knowledge, but looking to achieve a more well-rounded skill set."

Drawbacks of certification for "freshers" trying to break into SAP: "The myth of 'quick buck SAP certification' has its roots in the mid-90s and the heyday of SAP R/3. During the initial R/3 boom, it was indeed possible to land a high-paying SAP consulting gig if you were SAP certified. Even if you had no SAP project experience, you could get your foot in the door that way. But the "certification only" party ended pretty quickly. It didn't take long for hiring managers to wise up and start asking for some project skills to back up the paper credentials.

Fast forward fifteen years, and I still get many questions from SAP professionals who assume that they can land a project in SAP if they go out and get an SAP certification. But that is not necessarily the case. *Certification does not yet have a must-have status with SAP hiring managers.*"

How should individuals value SAP certification? "When we consider the value of certification, I think the biggest determining factor is: how many SAP jobs require certification? The answer is: only a small percentage. Project references are so much more important. Even those jobs that require SAP certification also tend to require a number of years in the SAP field as well. Too many people, especially "freshers," still look at SAP certification as a "career cure all." In the sense of a quick-fix solution, I see SAP certification (as it is currently constituted) as overrated. As a long term investment in the context of career best practices, SAP certification may be underrated. I do find that consultants who invest a portion of their earnings in self-education are always the ones to excel in the long run."

On the current status of certification with SAP hiring managers: "The Associate level certification (lowest level of new three tier), which is the equivalent of the classic SAP certification, has never made a huge impression on me, simply because in so many years of evaluating consultants, it never seemed to be the key to who was a difference maker on client projects. However, the second tier, the Professional level, does strike me as more rigorous."

On the Professional and Master levels of SAP certification: "The second tier, the Professional level, does appear to be more rigorous. I'd like to see the Professional level certification acquire more prestige as it gets more recognition in the SAP world. And as for the Master level, which is undefined as of this writing, it would be great if SAP eventually achieved a Cisco level of prestige affiliated with that level of certification."

4. Where SAP Certification is Falling Short

Certification is not recognized by the market (employers) as it should

- Certifications have lost most of their credibility since it was designed to certify Academy curriculum only. That can certify a person out of the academy with ZERO experience. That is not what most employers are looking for. This model works at the beginning when new functionality is introduced.

- Until recently, there was no way to certify experience. (can argue that even today, this is not done.)

- Few consultants are certified.

- There are very important skills that are not possible to certify, like people skill and problem solving skills.

Certification not recognized by the SAP professionals

- Market doesn't ask for it

- Until recently it was not able to certify project experience.

- Most of the time, for senior consultants it is too difficult (and in same way a waste of time) to go back to study the basics just to pass an exam that was mainly targeted to "out of academy" guys.

- Lots of professionals are specialists (areas of a module or areas of development) while the certifications are quite generic.

  - Ex1: SAP Certified Application Professional - Logistics Execution & Warehouse Mgmt. with SAP ERP 6.0 EHP4. I could go for this exam in the Transportation area. As for WM, I am not as experienced. Result = I simply won't take the exam.

  - Ex2: SAP Certified Application Associate - Sales Order Management with SAP ERP 6.0 - Someone may not be enough experienced to take the same, but in Pricing alone, the person is very experienced. I am sure that SAP clients would like to be able to search resources by subareas.

The facts and concerns: Room for Evolution

We believe we have room for evolution and improvement in the certification concept and process.

Access to certification
 Should you work for SAP, with SAP or on SAP, the access to the certification is basically allowed to anyone, which should normally not a major issue. Anyone willing to pass the exam can take the test. This leads, according to us, to a reduction of the quality standard SAP should aim

for. We would advise that the certification exam enrolment is first examined by an SAP staff member. There would be an assessment form, providing the following information:

- Basic Personal Details

- Professional background information

- Years of expertise in SAP (Hands-on, technical, project, training, etc)

- Number of project (Release, tasks description).

- Two full references from customers

Each enrolment form should also have a motivation letter (not mandatory but strongly advised), illustrating the main reasons why the person would like to be certified. The motivation letter would also contain Business Case where the 'certification applicant' would illustrate one way to solve the Business Case.
 A pre-enrolment form should also be made available online, in order for the 'certification applicant' to self assess his skills but most of all to validate his basic SAP understanding and knowledge. I was amazed the number of consultants that I see each year that still don't know or can describe or even worse place it in the SAP integration model, basic concept such as a 'Personnel Area', 'Company Code', a 'Cost Centre' etc.

Furthermore, the access to the certification should be sponsored by company a representative, which would strengthen internal 'screening' and only send persons who are 'all set'.

Timing

The time elapse between college graduation or new job started and certification is also way too short. We have seen SAP academies training in batch for young BIG4 graduates who just started working. Right after the Academy (more or less a month), they pass the certification.
 The trouble is that, as far we're aware, most companies dealing with or on behalf of SAP have different titles such as SAP Partner etc. Without any 'easy shortcut', it is quite obvious then that in order to meet percentage requirements of certified staff, mostly consultants are certified asap.
 We believe this is the wrong approach which pretty much seals the high excellence objective the certification was meant to reach.

Certification exam

The way the certification exam is achieved, is done through a set of Multiple Choice Questions. We fear that the certification only focuses on the theory part. Back to my pilot License traineeship, how would you expect to fly a plane, without any check of the hands-on skills?
 Not only we could discuss the phrasing of these questions but some of them are quite misleading.
 We believe the Multiple Choice Questions should be the first steps which, if successfully achieved would lead to a 'practical exam'.

Certification content

Theory sample questions from HR

- How many logical databases do we have?

- What is an infotype ?

- • What are payroll infotypes used for ?

- • What is the Cross Application Time Sheet ?

Pure theory

Remember, Martin's last certification exam was quite frustrating as the questionnaire was asking the exact names of the cycles and schemas of Payroll Management. Martin personally don't see the added value of such questions as the standard document should be used for that. He believes more critical theory questions could be asked.
  Questions such as which logical database do we have make sense for example as we almost all deal with infosets and queries.

Missing questions on new functionalities

When looking at the certification topics and question ratio per area, we're afraid not all areas are covered (at least in our HCM certifications). For example, Self Services functionalities (Employee and Manager), new functionalities provided through enhancement packages etc.
  We would have the choice to add these in the existing certification curriculum or add a new certification track.

Certification feedback

Increase communication channel ! Nothing is more frustrating than leaving the room with no feedback at all.

Data from Dice.com: Certification rarely a factor in today's SAP job requirements

An analysis of SAP job postings on any of the major job boards indicates that SAP certification does not appear as a "must have" requirement on many SAP job orders.

To cite one example of these statistics, as of Monday August 31st on Dice.com:

2,979 jobs with SAP somewhere in the job title or description.
  1,776 jobs with SAP in the actual job title.

24 results with the phrase "SAP certification" somewhere in the job description.

Of those 24 results that had "SAP certification" in the job description:

• 7 listed SAP certification as a requirement

(of those 7, 5 were jobs with Vertex, an SAP software partner)

• The remaining 24 jobs listed SAP certification as "preferred," with only listing SAP certification as "desirable" and one as "highly desirable."

This is a typical search result when an assessment of the importance of SAP certification to SAP job requirements is conducted on a major job board. SAP itself often requires certification when it hires independents, and it may increasingly put pressure on its partners to do the same, but it's clear that the customer community does not prioritize SAP certification in hiring based on these statistics.

Stats like these are a good indication of why SAP Mentors have sometimes expressed skepticism when SAP Education cites a high degree of emphasis on certification in their own survey results. Hopefully further surveys will provide more actionable insight into why SAP users don't prioritize SAP certification in their hiring.

Equally, such stats, when compared with different firm requirements and individual experience tell another story: SAP does not have a coherent market message around certification but one that is articulated in an ad hoc fashion by its ecosystem.

Roche: one SAP user's view on SAP certification

On February 4, 2009, Jon Reed attended the SAP Business Suite 7 announcement in New York City. This was the day of former SAP CEO Leo Apotheker's infamous "Are you certified?" argument with Deal Architect's Vinnie Mirchandani (Jon Reed was present during the blogger session where the "Are you certified?" exchange occurred.) Apotheker's question to Vinnie indicated the value SAP places on SAP certification internally. But later that same day, a different view came by way of Jennifer Allerton, CIO of Roche, an SAP customer.

To kick off that portion of the interview, Jon Reed asked Allerton about the SAP skills she looks for in consultants and how important certification is to her hiring. Allerton responded by talking about how important it is for her team to be able to "cherry pick" the consultants they want from the systems integrators, and that this creates some awkward dynamics as the SIs don't necessarily want to part with their best people on any one project. Allerton went on to talk about how much she likes the Microsoft Engineer certification, and that she would welcome, by implication, SAP putting forth a similarly effective certification.

The next questions came from Ed Herrmann of EnterpriseGeeks.com . Ed is also an SAP Mentor who works with Colgate Palmolive. He asked Allerton to elaborate on why she likes the Microsoft Engineer certification so much. Allerton said that in her experience, Microsoft certification "is a good indicator of the quality of the people we will hire." Allerton said she would like to see SAP certification head in the same direction.

Jon then asked the looming question: "So have you found that SAP certification is indicative of the quality of SAP consultants?"

Allerton's two word answer: "Not yet."

Allerton's views give some perspective to the stats quoted from Dice.com in the previous section. The authors of this paper have personally found that when it comes to customer viewpoints on SAP certification, they are more likely to reflect Allerton's views than Apotheker's "Are you certified?" stance.

All of which begs the question: Is SAP certification worthwhile at either the individual or firm level? Right now, the answer seems to be a resounding 'no.'

5. Recommendations for Improving Certification

Potential improvements to exam prerequisites, content, and logistics

- Certification question sampling - review sampling questions, where is the added value in asking for the technical names of Time and Payroll Schemas?

- Add integration questions - We have always been told that the integration model was the **key feature** in SAP. Therefore, it would make sense to add integration topics with other modules.

- Adjust questions to reflect the latest functional enhancements and products. There should also be questions that expect candidates to explain how they might tackle a problem. External reviewers could then judge how knowledgeable the certification applicant would be in that business case scenario.

- Review Certification pre-requisites - Example: What are the Talent Management pre-requisites?

- Include a Business Case - candidates receive a Business Case and have an hour to think about it and demonstrate (based on standard IDES system) an approach that answers the requirements in hands. Responsiveness, creativity and ability to find a solution could all be assessed. This puts the analyst / consultant firmly into a business context that potential employers can recognize as having value.

- Face to face exam - if SAP is to move to a more professional approach then does it make sense to continue with an exam system that concludes with a single Multiple Choice questionnaire? There should be per country, a designated certification 'board' that reflects the needs of different territories. The key benefit I see in this initiative, besides the facts that we personalize the certification approach and meet/network with the 'certification applicant", is that Certification could then rank the certification certificate with a level A, B, C, D. This would challenge us to apply for a next level certification, if desired. It would be part of each individual development plan follow up.

- Development Plan follow up - take advantage of LMS/LSO not only a perfect vitrine to demo.

- Reinforce impartiality - although it would be difficult for non initiated SAP staff, an option could be to let an international well recognized company to organize and setup the Certification protocol and exam. This would most likely strengthen ever more the certification certificate every one would have passed and earned.

  SAP comment:
  The exam questions are being constantly reviewed and enhanced. There are still some questions which are purely knowledge recall but the proportion of those questions is constantly reducing. Integration is definitely a key topic which is a cornerstone of the Professional profiles. All of the certification exams were updated in 2009 year to reflect Business Suite 7 enhancements on both Associate and

Professional level. Problem-solving questions can already be found at Professional level where 40% of questions test the candidate's ability to conceptualize, blueprint, modify, and optimize integrated solutions and processes and further 40% focus on their ability to build, implement, configure, model, and troubleshoot solutions and processes.

SAP Education eliminated the mandatory reinforcement of prerequisites from the certification program in the last 3 years because they were deemed unfair as they would automatically imply that on the job training cannot be an alternative to classical training. This is often a false assumption in the case of more experienced consultants and should not be implemented as an artificial barrier to entry into the certification program. We do point to the fact that a candidate should have a certain amount of training and/or project experience to have a fair chance of passing the exam but we do not mandate that with strict prerequisites. The exam itself should be the differentiator.

Many of the questions in the Professional level exams are already scenario based but more complex business case scenario analyses are planned for the Master Level certification. Our job task analyses showed that this was not normally expected from an Associate level consultant or employee who would be working in a mentored position in the initial projects.

The certification program needs to have global standards. SAP's customers need to know that a certified resource has met the same standards irrespective of where he has taken his test – especially in times of very high global mobility levels. In the same way SAP strives to incorporate the maximum level of objectivity into the testing process. Manual and country based marking would be counterproductive to that objective. The proposed personalization of the certification could be a significant risk to the objectivity – and therefore the credibility - of the certification program if implemented in any larger scale manner. It is being considered as a possible way forward for the Master certification but on a larger scale we could be faced with issues of legal defensibility. Who should be involved in the marking ? SAP Education? SAP Consultants? Customers ? A broad spectrum across the Partner ecosystem so that the employees of one particular partner do not feel that their interests are inadequately represented? If we were to consider this for the Associate and Professional levels it would not only be an unmanageable exercise but could have serious legal consequences for SAP and its stakeholders.

The proposal to let an international well recognized company to organize and setup the Certification protocol and exam is somewhat aligned with our transformation objectives. SAP enlisted the support of external internationally reputable psychometrics companies to ensure that we had the best possible advice on industry best practices and legal defensibility and validity and this advice was implemented with substantial changes to the test creation and review process supervised by external testing experts. At the end of the day it is however SAP's responsibility to its customers to have a valid benchmark. The collaboration with professional institutions is a worthy target and something that we would like to follow up on more in 2010, e.g. by recognizing external accreditations such as PMI, TOGAF as part of our certification process.

Re-assess/improve multiple choice format on Level I, the defacto standard

- There is a considerable group of SAP Mentors (though not a consensus!) that question whether the multiple choice exam format will ever be sufficient to assess the validity of SAP knowledge, especially as SAP continues to emphasize the need for process-driven expertise across SAP products. If the multiple choice question (MCQ) format remains the standard, then considerable work must be done to persuade the SAP community that such a format is an effective validator of SAP knowledge.

- Currently, the Associates level is all MCQ format and the Professional level is virtually all MCQ as well. Many SAP Mentors believe that even at the Associates level, some form of additional subjective evaluation, such as a written essay question, is necessary to demonstrate the problem-solving ability (and communication skills) needed from even a junior SAP professional.

- At the Professional level, which sets a higher standard, there is a near-consensus amongst SAP Mentors that more than MCQ is needed. Perhaps a verified customer reference in addition to a situational hands-on task or a couple of real-life essay questions would bolster the Professional level to a point where it has the prestige all in the community want it to have.

  SAP comment:
  SAP would welcome more involvement from the Mentor community in the question writing and review workshops. This has in my experience certainly served to change the mind of the consultants involved. At the beginning we also often heard that this was impossible but got frequent feedback from those involved that they had realized it is not actually impossible – just extremely difficult and not something which can be done without expert help in a workshop environment. Even in the severe travel budget constraints we have faced over the last 18 months we received recognition of the importance of the workshop scenario for the quality of the questions and got full approval of all travel costs for the creation of the Professional questions. An MCQ is not always just an MCQ.

  With reference to the proposal that some form of additional subjective evaluation, such as a written essay question, is necessary the marking is here the issue. SAP has the technology at our disposal following the transition of our test creation and delivery infrastructure last year to collect and manual mark essay questions. There are three major issues here:
  - Lack of objectivity – a massive risk for legal defensibility
  - Waiting time for results – test takers are used to having immediate results at the point of test taking. Many have an essential need behind their certification, e.g. job application, RFI requirement, bonus plan. Requiring them to wait for several weeks for their results after manual marking could cause significant customer satisfaction issues.
  - During the job task profile evaluations it has not been identified as necessary by subject matter experts for an Associate level to contribute to the success of a project

by writing an essay. They are required to work within a mentored environment and to have a good understanding of "where the pieces fit".

The multiple choice questions developed for the Professional exams validate the application of knowledge and skills and we have had fairly consistent feedback from the 1,000+ consultants who have taken the Professional certification exams last year that they could not have answered some of the questions without real project experience. Obviously this is an ongoing process and we are constantly looking to improve our question writing techniques accordingly. We also switched last year from the in-house test creation and delivery platform to an industry standard infrastructure which would allow us technically to experiment with other question formats in the future. The important factor for "experimentation" however is to have sufficient statistical data to be able to make well informed decisions on where to go next. We always assume that there is not too much room for experiments when a person's career depends on the outcome of an exam so we are understandably conservative in introducing new forms prior to getting some real evidence in place. – but could definitely be something for the future.

Inclusion of field experience

- There is not a consensus amongst Mentors that verified field experience evaluation/reference is needed at the Associates level. However, there is a near-consensus when it comes to including a field experience component is needed at the Professional and Master level.

- SAP is seriously looking at field experience inclusion in the Master level, but even at the Professional level, some form of hands-on skills assessment is a glaring and obvious need in the view of most SAP Mentors.

- Whether this hands-on assessment takes place in a laboratory setting, or consists of a verified oral reference from a hiring manager or SAP product manager, most SAP Mentors feel that some form of field experience validation is needed to enhance the credibility of the Professional level of certification.

- An alternative approach might be the inclusion of a multi-faceted case study that requires the inclusion of several component elements. This is something we see in many professional styles of examination and is used to good effect in testing candidates' ability to come up with solutions that reflect current thinking.

SAP comment:
SAP will continue to evaluate alternative testing methods for the Professional level but in the interests of objectivity and legal defensibility only objective testing methods will be considered. Verified references are being considered for the Master level but the overall number of Master certification candidates allows this to be conducted on a much smaller scale – thus allowing a deeper involvement of other stakeholder groups in the evaluation process. Subjective evaluation on the scale necessary for the Professional level would only be feasible within the SAP Education infrastructure. This holds significant risks from a legal defensibility and objectivity perspective.

I think we possibly need to differentiate between technology, development exams and application exams. The job task profile evaluation show that the customer expectation for a Professional level application consultant is not really the hands-on practice but that they need to know how to manage projects, roadmap, etc. and that broader integration experience etc. (see above) plays a more key role. But we should definitely continue the discussion in 2010 around whether the tasks required of a development or technology consultant possibly need other assessment forms.

Online delivery and innovation to address costs of training and speed of application innovation

1. Integrate new SAP Learning on Demand offerings with certification exam preparation wherever appropriate.

• SAP is showing some training innovation around the area of Learning on Demand (LOD). Furthermore, the LOD team is proving to be a winning example of consistent dialogue with both the SAP Mentor community and the SCN community as a whole via blogging.

• One of the most encouraging aspects of the new SAP LOD web site is the rating system which will allow consumers of content to rate the caliber of the training they receive. However, a higher degree of integration between SAP LOD training and exam preparation is needed (the LOD team is aware of this need and it has already been expressed directly by SAP Mentors on several occasions).

• One of the major obstacles to the improved status of SAP certification in today's economy is the ability for individuals to spare the time and expense needed for traditional SAP Academy training. Providing online exam preparation via LOD courses addresses one of the biggest concerns of the SAP community around SAP training and certification: the high costs of validating knowledge. The new LOD site, properly linked into SAP certification exam preparation, could go a long way towards clearing out this major obstacle. The costs of SAP exams are not generally cited as an obstacle by those trying to become certified, but the high costs of training and preparing for the exam through SAP Academy classes are often cited. A judicious use of LOD exam preparation can help to overcome this objection.

• We are aware that SAP Education is concerned that too much online training and exam preparation will "cannibalize" existing course revenues. We believe that SAP has to move beyond a fear of cannibalizing revenues. There is another cost entailed when the most senior independent SAP consultants are often the most vocal critics of SAP Education. Making it easy for such senior experts to prepare for exams will pay off enormously for SAP in terms of community PR. Short term revenue concerns must be balanced with long term community reputation for SAP certification to take a leap forward, and online exam training and preparation could be a real asset to SAP going forward.

• LOD also provides many opportunities for inserting 'real world' problem solving styles of question. This would be welcome by at least some SAP Mentors who argue that in candidate selection, they are far more interested in a candidate's ability to demonstrate THOSE skills rather than the ability to deal with purely theoretical knowledge. Over time, that could lead to two way learnings of the kind that help formulate best practices SAP can put into the marketplace.

SAP comment:
The SAP Education Transformation Strategy focuses strongly on all of these points. It could be that SAP mentors are aware of concerns of revenue cannibalization but, as with all major transformation initiatives, it has its communication challenges. These concerns in no way reflect the strategy or the KPIs of the SAP Education organization. Everyone has made significant progress last year in providing more flexible learning methods. VLC has been a huge success and 2010 and there are concrete targets and changes being driven to significantly increase the proportion of virtual learning options and we will see, thanks to the new Education strategy, many more leaps in this direction. We look forward to collaborating more closely with the SAP Mentor community on this transformation in 2010.

Customer data benchmarking (apply lessons from SAP-SUGEN KPIs)

• One voice that is too often missing from SAP certification discussions is that of the SAP customer. We can look to the discussions between SAP and SUGEN on establishing Enterprise Support KPIs as one model of collaboration that is a great improvement on SAP "going it alone" and imposing changes on customers.

• The same type of model should be used more often with SAP certification. SAP needs benchmark data around SAP customers' current attitudes around SAP certification and how customers believe the program should be improved. Some survey data already existed, but the Mentors feel that the existing certification data is flawed and skewed towards more favorable attitudes towards SAP certification than existing in the SAP customer community.

• If a certification program is better aligned with customer needs and data, it will stand a much greater chance of success. Some of the key data points needed: do SAP customers, as a broad group, find that certified consultants are superior to non-certified consultants? Why or why not? And what do customers want to see in terms of changes to how consultants are certified?

• If SAP undertakes a dialogue with customers about certification, we would suggest that this conversation be as visible as possible so that those in the community can see the efforts and perhaps offer their input where appropriate. Right now, those visible input channels and regular updates are not happening. Consistent blog updates on progress made toward benchmarking customer data might be one way to address this.

• SAP Education has sometimes cited the relevance of SAP certification to hiring decisions in a way that feels overstated to those SAP Mentors who work with SAP customers on hiring issues (this overstatement can be backed up by statistics on Dice.com and other job boards that show the small percentage of current SAP jobs that require SAP certification). When SAP certification is truly aligned with SAP customer needs, the number of job orders that require SAP certification will increase accordingly.

• **The authors are encouraged to hear that SAP Education is strongly leaning towards more aggressive surveys of SAP customers on SAP certification that have been done to date, potentially assisted by SAP user groups.** Our understanding is that one such survey is underway. We need to see more of this type of data. If it can be gathered now, then the progress made by the new three tiered program can be measured and built upon.

SAP comment:
The initial recommendations for the changes to the Certification Strategy were driven strongly by customer feedback and this continues to be a major focus for SAP Education. We have also enlisted customer feedback in the validation of our job task profiles to ensure that they are not too partner-focused and in the stakeholder survey around the Master Certification requirements. Unfortunately we have not received as much feedback as we would have liked to see from the User Groups. In fact we have distributed a couple of surveys on individual certification programs and on the certification program in general, needs for improvement etc. and got no responses. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss with the SAP Mentors how we should better approach this in 2010. It is immensely important that we get this customer feedback on an ongoing basis.

You can't deliver on process-driven ERP without new skills education

1. Emphasize the importance of certification and process-driven skills education through visible emphasis at SAP events.

2. BPX certification is an excellent starting point, but eventually process-driven sensibility must span the entire curriculum.

3. End goal: SAP training curriculum is built on end-to-end process know-how rather than module-based silos that provide candidates, ecosystem partners and customers with an equal sense of confidence that SAP certification delivers value to all.

• Now that the shortages of 30,000 consultants worldwide cited by SAP a year ago have largely dissipated, there is some potential for complacency around SAP skills development However, with SAP moving its best practices (and NetWeaver technology) towards a process-driven approach which features service composition over custom development, and end-to-end business process over "module silos," it is important for SAP Education to stay in step with these trends.

• At SAP trade shows and events - as well as on SAP's online communities - SAP Education should be a leading voice in helping SAP customers and consultants understand how SAP skills are changing and how SAP coursework addresses these changes. Regular webinars and virtual events would set a tone the SAP Education is a force for skills innovation and not chasing SAP skills needs from behind.

• The SAP BPX curriculum represents one important aspect of how SAP Education is addressing this change to process-driven ERP, but more needs to be done to ensure that BPX, BPM, and BI concepts are embedded into the SAP training curriculum and certification exams just like embedded analytics and service-enablement is being integrated into the SAP product itself.

SAP comment:
This is highly valuable input and reflects the focus of the Education Transformation strategy as mentioned earlier. One of the cornerstones of the transformation is significant changes to process and infrastructure to enable the modularization and multi-modal delivery of training content to directly address this issue. All training is now being developed on the basis of solid well validated job task analyses which represents a substantial shift from the product function and feature school of thought. However I would disagree that there is some potential for complacency around SAP skills development .It is more important than ever in these high risk times for our customers to have access to highly skilled resources. Maybe the volume is not always the primary focus in all regions - but the quality of those resources is more important than ever – and that is where certification's importance stands.

Consider providing certification discounts/free certification for SCN leaders and Mentors

• One important way of achieving buy-in from SAP community leaders and Mentors is to consider offering them free or discounted access to SAP training and/or exams. Many SAP Mentors are not certified and would surely welcome the opportunity for relevant training or certification if it came with limited expenses on their part and if it meant their status is enhanced.

• For SAP Education, there could be significant marketing benefits from such discounts as those who are certified can then vouch for the process in SCN forums and on their own blogs. However, it should be noted that offering free or discounted certification will not solve the SAP Education dilemma by itself.

• Important caveat: SAP community leaders will not become advocates for certification simply because they have obtained one; some of SAP certification's biggest critics are those who are currently certified but found that (a) either the exam was not a rigorous validation of their knowledge or (b) it had little if any impact on their job search prospects. Therefore, increased access to certification will only work in conjunction with follow through on our other recommendations.

• SAP's Learning on Demand team recently provided access to LOD to SAP Mentors in exchange for feedback on the LOD system. This might provide a good model for how SAP Education could benefit from the same type of knowledge exchange but again, it is, of itself only one dimension of a much larger problem.

SAP comment:
We would welcome more help in the development of exams and training materials from the Mentor community. This has not been as widespread as it could have been as we have a prerequisite for item writers that they are certified. Any mentors interested in supporting this development process should contact me directly so that we can discuss options for getting them certified.

Continued structured dialogue with SAP Mentors and influencers until critics become advocates

- SAP Education has taken some steps to engage with the SAP Mentor community and community influencers. Going forward, a more structured process of taking ongoing dialogue and integrating into future course offerings is needed. We have seen examples of dialogue with SAP Mentors and SAP Education that has faded, perhaps due to the learning curve on all sides to create a constructive, ongoing dialogue. More SAP certification webinars with Mentors are in the works, which is good, but some SAP Mentors have told us that their communication with SAP Education seems to fade in and out, and trail off occasionally. The real fruits of a dialogue are: consistent communication leading to measurable results. SAP Education and the SAP Mentors need to align on what those results might be and how they can be measured.

- Talking to SAP community influencers, even in a private setting, can be a rigorous experience, fielding criticisms from all sides, but we maintain that until the SAP Mentors and other key SCN contributors become true advocates of SAP certification, that SAP will not succeed in changing the perceived status of SAP certification in the customer ecosystem.

- Many SAP Mentors are leading independent consultants with an intimate knowledge of the SAP functionality in their area and a clear view on how this knowledge should be properly assessed and certified. The involvement of SAP Mentors and other community leaders in the exam questions and content has happened in some instances and is a welcome step.

- It is true that there will never be a consensus on the virtues of SAP certification. However, a base of community support for SAP certification will be achieved at the point that SAP Mentors and community influencers believe that: 1. Certification has become a crucial factor in SAP hiring decisions; and 2. That the exam itself truly "certifies" the knowledge necessary for success in that area of SAP and that (3) it is representative of a level of professional skill and accomplishment that has broad market appeal.

- To expect that an Associate level exam can validate all aspects of the consulting skills needed for a senior SAP consultant or an SAP Mentor is not fair to SAP Education. However, because the Associates exam remains the defacto standard, simply hoping that the market will embrace the higher standards set at the Professional and Master levels is not sufficient; the status of SAP certification must be addressed at the Associates level as well. The dialogue with SAP Mentors to date has confirmed this community perception. Whether through the inclusion/validation of a customer reference, or the inclusion of at least one written question that further assesses the candidate's knowledge and qualifications, something must be done to enhance the Associate level certification. This much has been discussed already, now further dialogue is needed.

- The combination of including SAP influencers in the dialogue and improving these certification fundamentals will turn certification "critics into advocates." However, just "seeking input" from Mentors and community leaders without a willingness to significantly change the status quo is going to backfire. Input without results is not going to work, so these structured conversations need to turn into calendared action items that are informed by a willingness to question assumptions rather than hope that SAP certification is going to improve in some slow, evolutionary manner when the ERP market is changing much faster.

SAP comment:
These comments unfortunately do not reflect the true situation. There have already

been significant changes to SAP's certification program over the last three years and there are more to be expected in the coming months. None of us have sufficient time to waste on gathering input and not implementing change.

Revision on certification areas to better reflect the market

• SAP Certification needs to better address the diversity of the SAP market. If SAP resources don't identify themselves with a particular certification topic/level, this resource will probably never get certified. Some of us believe that this is one of the reasons why certification has not been widely accepted .

• As an example, someone takes an Academy course in SD. During this curriculum, the overall basics of SD are covered and the candidate should be qualified for taking the Associate SD level exam. After that, once this person starts to work, career level development might follow any number of paths. Some may never touch say billing, but may be well qualified as pricing experts. The Professional/Master (non-existent still) certification is supposed to certify all around SD knowledge, but that may just be unrealistic. Additionally, when employers need resources, they usually have a specific need in mind. Again, with our SD example, the employer might only be looking for a pricing expert. The current 3-tier certification level does not address this type of problem.

• One approach would be to break down Master or Master and Professional certification levels into more specific topics. The break down could be one of the following:

  • SAP SD Associate Level - SD Basic Academy curriculum certification;

  • SAP SD Professional level; - SD advanced knowledge;

  • SAP SD Master level - Broken down in to smaller pieces (still the same certification size);

    • Pricing Master

    • Sales Order Processing and Contracts Master

    • Billing and AR

• Another example of this is LE. Logistics Execution is a vast area covering Transportation, WM, Shipping. Professional and Master Levels should be more specific.

• The downside risk of such finely grained learning and examination is that consultants become too narrowly focused. However, that can be addressed through skills augmentation to include new post qualification courses and examinations that allow consultants to not only refresh their skills but add to them as market conditions change.

SAP comment:
This is exactly why the job task validation process is so important. These profiles are created by several subject matter experts, consultants, instructors, freelancers… and then further validated by at least 20 individuals working in the field at that level. They are asked to measure the frequency of certain tasks or topics in their projects as well as how critical these areas are to the project success. The results of these surveys are then fed back into the job task profile to ensure that it reflects the

market perspective. SAP Education gathered extensive internal and external feedback in the validation of these profiles. This level of specialization is not what the customer and partner feedback showed us is needed.

Consider implementing (or integrating) an online consultant ratings system

• There is no question that ratings functionality has had a powerful impact on many web communities, helping those within those communities to better asses the caliber of products or services offered. It would be ideal if SAP Education could find a way to link its certification program with an external measure of consultant quality.

• It may be that the best way to do this is not to invent such a system but to piggy back on an existing system. The SAP Community Network is currently rolling out ratings systems for a variety of kinds of content. Perhaps SAP Education will one day have a roster of all those who are currently certified, and those who are certified can link to their resumes and online profiles such as LinkedIn.

• In turn, these online "certification badges" might either incorporate (or point to) somewhere on the SCN community that rates that individual or contains customer references. Linking SAP Certification to other means of consultant evaluation would strengthen certification by tying it into other means of evaluation. The SAP ecosystem would come to understand that certification is now part of a series of components through which a well-rounded assessment of an individual's qualifications can be achieved. This would allow SAP certification to focus on improving quantifiable skills validation while also providing a means to evaluate other characteristics of a high caliber SAP consultant that visibility into on site performance would provide.

• Such systems need to be handled with extreme care. It is all too easy for ratings to be gamed without there being a means of validating what is being said. Therefore, the inclusion of a rating system as part of the overall certification assessment procedure must be capable of independent adjudication and, if necessary, include a system of appeals referral.

SAP comment:
This is not objective certification. It is a community tool for creating references and is highly valuable as such. It should not however be integrated with the certification goal. These are two different cards a consultant has in their hand. Realistically a customer will base an engagement or recruitment decision on a variety of criteria, INCLUDING but not only certification. These ideas should be complementary to the certification. We are currently working together with SCN to get the certification status into the SCN business card by mid-year and that could then be combined in that way.

Cisco as a benchmark?

One of the incentives of certification has to be the perceived notion that your skills are worth more in the marketplace. It is said of Cisco certification: "Out of all of those available, many IT professionals view a Cisco certification as one of the most valued and respected certifications available in the information technology world. It has been proven that employees with a Cisco certification are amongst some of the highest paid professionals in the information technology world." Can the same be said of SAP Certification? Reference has been made elsewhere that SAP Certification is not figuring significantly in new hires. What makes Cisco certification more compelling?

It is generally thought that the Architect designation is one of the hardest examinations anywhere in IT but does difficulty conflate to competence? There is debate around that but there is no denying that the Cisco Certified Design Expert (CCDE) practical certification examination for example provides a rich test of a candidate's ability. Coincidentally, the linked page is based upon Jive Software technology, something that SAP has already licensed. It includes plenty of useful and relevant information from which candidates can draw knowledge.

One issue that re-occurs in implementations and hiring is the question of subject matter expertise. Cisco attempts to manage this through the establishment of specialized lines of certification. This is something we would expect to see SAP develop over time as it would better reflect customers' needs, especially in the business process driven environment. It would also help define best practices for process solutions - something that is not easy to disseminate from today's available materials.

SAP comment:
The maturity of the CISCO certification has allowed them to build up that reputation with some of the best psychometricians in the world since the mid-90's. It has grown up closely aligned with the Cisco partner programs and the Cisco business strategy over the years – and has benefited from that natural evolution. As you correctly summarized in your introduction SAP certification was unfortunately not always well aligned in the past to be core to business strategy and partner programs and had tended to drift more into a post-training assessment mode. The relaunch of the SAP certification strategy set out to address that realignment and significantly enhance the validity of the certification to make it a valuable customer benchmark. However, as you also correctly identified there is still legacy perception in the market to a certain extent which we need to replace. But we will get there.

Ensure the availability of certification testing at live SAP events like TechEd

In the past, TechEd has provided an affordable means for many SAP professionals to obtain certification without the expenses associated with traveling to an exam location. The authors are under the impression that exam testing at online locations has been scaled back, whereas we have the view that this type of co-location of testing and trade show participation should be ramped up rather than scaled back.

If there are issues, logistically or otherwise with such exam co-location, a good approach might be to pull in community leaders such as Mentors and brainstorm alternatives and/or solve the problems that have resulted in a scale back of such programs. If anything, expanding such testing to events like Sapphire seems more appropriate given the emphasis SAP has placed upon certification.

Discussions of certification at SAP trade shows is another way of building recognition for certification and obtaining valuable input from SAP practitioners. At this year's TechEd events, there are no formal programs pertaining to SAP certification. A session presenting the ABAP Professional Certification, to cite one example, would have been well received and well attended. It would also have set a tone of dialogue with the community, something that is often not visible around SAP certification and no doubt contributions to one of the most common criticisms we hear about SAP certification from community members - that it is simply a "money grab" for SAP.

While it is too late for any formal sessions at TechEd this fall, the Mentors have suggested a meetup with higher level SAP Education representatives on this topic at Phoenix, Vienna, or both, and this could be one more step in the right conversational direction.

SAP comment:
The onsite certification offering at TechEd has only historically been in significant demand in Bangalore and that was again successfully offered in 2009. Discounted certification vouchers were also offered in Las Vegas and discounted BPX and EA training was offered in EMEA. The demand outside Bangalore was however extremely low. We would welcome ideas on what we should possibly be doing differently because the current concept isn't working well.

Invest in superior language translations of certification exams

One issue that has come to light during the creation of this white paper that has not received much discussion is the issue of language translations of SAP exams. The perspectives the authors have received from those who have taken translated SAP exams is that the translations leave a lot to be desired.

Awkward translations impact the ability of the test taker to properly assess the question at hand and answer the question correctly. Since SAP is currently dependent on the multiple choice format for all exams at the Associate and Professional level, with no write in answers, the way questions are phrased has a huge impact on the final score of the exam taker.

The authors recommend that in each region where exam translations are offered, SAP Education gather a small board or group of SAP experts in that native language to review exam materials. These experts would identify questions that could be particularly misleading and suggest other ways of phrasing key questions to ensure that the exam is testing the right knowledge and is fair to those who are taking it.

> SAP comment:
> The translation policy was changed in 2008 so that this is now a global responsibility but there are still some older translations that need to be reviewed. Since 2008 we are also monitoring regularly the way in which different language exams perform. Also, as mentioned earlier we have completely overhauled our feedback and complaints processes so that we can channel the feedback of this kind much better. SAP education already has a local review process in place with Subject Matter Experts.

Start with SAP as a vocation and work backwards from there

Two views towards the end game of SAP certification are particular useful:

1. **Customer-centric view**: "What does SAP need to do to ensure SAP certification delivers real value to customers and aids in their SAP skills evaluation and hiring?" (To realize this view, more impartial customer data is needed).

2. **Vocational view**: "What would it take for SAP certification to become a true vocational rite of passage? What would it take for SAP to be perceived as a professional trade with a universal set of standards defined and validated by SAP certification?"

Our experience is that SAP customers are interested in both views. They want to trust SAP certification during hiring processes, and they want to perceive SAP certification as a validator of SAP professional competency.

For SAP Education to achieve its aims, it may make a great deal of sense to start with the end game and work backwards from there. For example, in order for SAP certification to be perceived as a high-status trade, advancement within SAP must require more credentials than simply passing a multiple choice exam that can be gamed. More importantly, SAP certification must somehow be able to measure the skills of the most senior SAP professionals. As of this writing, most senior SAP professionals (including SAP Mentors) do not measure their skills via SAP certification or perceive their professional ambitions based on adding a new certification to their portfolio. For some, certification is a "nice to have." For others, it's dismissed as a financial play on SAP's part that does not have relevance to their ability to find work at any rate.

For SAP certification to be the standard for entry (and advancement) into the SAP trade, many of these perceptions have to change. The BPX curriculum may be one place to start, as we have seen many consultants express interest in what they could learn in BPX classes to expand beyond their silo knowledge boundaries. On the down side, almost as many don't have the time or resources to sit in on the classes they would like to. Working back from the end game, innovation in testing preparation and training becomes a big part of this picture. But so does the nature of the exam itself, which for the higher levels of SAP accomplishment, must find a way to go beyond its current skills validation level.

SAP comment
80% of our own SAP Consultants were certified by the end of 2009. A large number of our consultants are highly experienced SAP Professionals and embraced the opportunity to achieve Professional certification. They are proud of their achievements and we got highly positive feedback on the appropriate nature of the certification. So I would disagree that most senior SAP professionals are not considering the certification. We have already tested several thousand senior level consultants with Professional exams so far since their launch.

6. Group Conclusion

The ultimate goal for SAP Education should be to drive innovation within the SAP ecosystem. There are times when SAP Education seems to lag behind SAP itself, both in terms of its course content and the creative delivery of its learning solutions. Some of this "lagging" is inevitable as SAP Education must shadow product development. But this does not mean innovation is not a worthy objective. The group behind Learning on Demand seems to be setting a new tone. However, adding more flexible and affordable consumption options is only the beginning. If SAP Education can truly deliver on the kind of process-driven curriculum it has begun on the BPX side, it may find itself not only boasting increased revenues and market status, but also improving SAP's project success rate.

As Dennis Howlett wrote in a recent ZDNet blog entry, "I maintain the one area where SAP could make a really positive impact is in the learning space. While customers who know SAP love what it offers and can enjoy significant business difference, SAP remains the one company where the failure spotlight seems to shine with embarrassing frequency. If you can convince your customers that you have a solid education process and certification program in place that ensures consultants master the basics through to continuing professional education then you have the basis for: 1. sorting out the unruly Sis 2. creating an environment where SAP education has win-win-win value and 3.reducing the implementation risk.

Unfortunately, on the evidence I've seen to date, SAP hasn't got past the basic hurdle of figuring out what it wants to be in this area. It is launching Learning On-Demand which is a step in the right direction but that's an enabling step rather than a declaration of structured intent."

The authors of this white paper do not agree on everything, but we are all united in a passion for SAP and for the potential of SAP education, and certification in particular, to become a force for accountability and quality within the SAP ecosystem. However, for the promise of SAP certification to be realized, an attitude of radical reinvention must replace a hopeful faith in a gradual improvement. Today's economy rewards bold, well-executed innovation but penalizes companies that assume there is plenty of time to respond to market trends. The authors of the paper (and many other Mentors) are willing to collaborate with SAP Education on such bold reinventions, and so we offer up this white paper not as a piece of criticism, but as a working document that will hopefully lead us all towards a better result.

Appendix

7. SAP versus Oracle Certification

A common response when assessing SAP's performance in a particular area is to ask, "How does Oracle compare?" In the case of certification, SAP ends up comparing favorably to Oracle based on the information the authors have seen to date. We did not include this comparison in the body of the paper, however, because we believe that too much attention goes to comparisons between the two ERP superpowers when in fact, customer satisfaction is a better measure of a vendor's achievement.

This disclaimer aside, following is some information on SAP versus Oracle certification. Recently, Andy Klee, CEO of ERPtips and JDEtips, shared his own comparison of SAP and Oracle certifications in a blog post on how JD Edwards certification has changed over the years . (Note: Andy's own well-researched piece on SAP certification is also a must-read). Klee's observations are based on twenty-plus years in JD Edwards consulting and training and more recently, comparing training programs between Oracle and SAP. Andy has kindly given us permission to share a few excerpts from his post here, and he has also shared a few comments on SAP certification validation for our readers:

"Across the entire range of Oracle applications and technologies (Database, Middleware, Linux, E-Business Suite, PeopleSoft, Siebel, JD Edwards, Hyperion, and Oracle Billing and Revenue Management)—Oracle's certification programs seem to receive much less attention than SAP's certification programs."

Andy goes on to say: "Unlike SAP, Oracle does allow exams to be taken online. I'm not sure how they ensure that cheating does not occur." While the authors of this paper do advocate more affordable means of SAP exam preparation via online study, we don't advocate online exam administration. As Andy notes, Oracle does have one advantage over SAP: less expensive exam pricing: "Exams are priced between $95 and $195 each. That is very reasonable: SAP charges $500 or $750 per exam. With over 50,000 SAP exams administered each year, we're talking real money in the SAP ecosystem." Oracle would likely have to charge significantly more to administer the exams in supervised settings. *Andy Klee notes: "good point -- but I think it would add $150 per exam to have them proctored, given the volume."*

In terms of the number of courses available, Oracle lags behind SAP by about 50 exams from Andy's count: "Across all Oracle applications, including the two most recent releases of Oracle E-Business Suite, I counted a total of 33 certifications. There are also 48 more exams on Database, Middleware, and Linux topics. That's a total of 81 certification exams." SAP, meanwhile, currently has 130 exams, based primarily on the Associates level, with some Professional level exams now in the mix and the Master level exams also in the works. Andy points out there is one big vendor out there with a higher count: "The only company with even more IT certifications than SAP or Oracle is probably Microsoft."

In Andy's exceptional blog post, "SAP Certification - Does It Matter? " Andy points out that SAP also has opened up its certification program to a broader audience than Oracle: "SAP's certification program is available for SAP employees, partner employees, independent consultants, and client employees. Already SAP is ahead of Oracle—Oracle's certification programs for E-Business Suite, PeopleSoft, JD Edwards, and Siebel are only available to Oracle employees and partner employees."

At the end of this same blog post, Andy draws conclusions on SAP certification that are very similar in tone and content to what the authors of this white paper believe: "SAP doesn't provide a

certification program just for the revenue from exams and classes. I think SAP cares about certification because they want to ensure project success and happy, referenceable clients. Consultant quality is critical to making this happen. But the current certification program doesn't go far enough. SAP needs to extend the program to include practical experience and even evaluations of job performance. SAP needs to prove that individuals who pass the exams are, in fact, more successful than those without certification. Until that happens, certification is a nice to have, not a must have."

Upon review of this appendix chapter, Andy Klee added: *You might ask SAP education if they are planning to go further to validate the exams. I have the impression that they would like to take this next step.*

We were curious what Andy meant exactly by validation, so we asked him to elaborate. He responded:

"First, validation means to have valid questions, developed by Subject Matter Experts (SMEs). I would think that SAP does most of the process described here:

http://www.abccert.org/pdf_docs/abcvalidpamph.pdf

But then the next step is to validate that doing well on the exams is positively correlated with job performance:

http://books.google.com/books?id=Fp9gECdSzSoC&pg=PA6&lpg=PA6&dq=exam+scores+positive+correlation+with+job+performance&source=bl&ots=OZsHrRawUR&sig=0EHtqQiJsWkgwmIR4RYRayp4H4w&hl=en&ei=2fSWSpfcLJD8sgPl4pDNDA&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=4#v=onepage&q=&f=false

http://academic.cengage.com/resource_uploads/downloads/0324568398_119597.pdf

There might be better links, but I think the above will give readers an idea of what I mean." - Andy Klee -

Andy adds: Second, validation also means that the relationship between success as an SAP implementor is measured and it correlates positively with certification. This requires a long-term study, and Andy estimates an investment of several hundred thousand dollars/Euros.

8. Bibliography

- Make the Most of Your SAP Software - With Experts Certified by SAP : SAP Solution Brief[Ref. Material50 083 949 (07/09)

- Fuel Your Career With SAP Certification: SAP Solution Brief[Ref.Material 50 083 950 (07/09)

Note: both of these items were used in the contributions from Martin Gillet.

9. Acronyms

- SAP : System Application and Products in Data Processing

- LMS : Learning Management System

- LSO : Learning Solution. SAP's Learning Management System

- LOD : Learning on Demand

10. Online discussions regarding certifications

There are too many useful resources on SAP certification to list them all here. The section on "web resources" lists the official SAP certification links you will want to check out. This section has links to some blogging and article resources cited in the paper or contributed by the authors:

Michael Koch's survey of the views on SAP certification by independent SAP consultants (and Inside Track presentation)

"Dennis Howlett's memorable "Should You Be Certified?" blog post on SCN that set this conversation in motion

Jon Reed's ""Is SAP Certification Worth the Money? - one detailed piece from JonERP.com on his views

SAP Blue Book Author Michael Duane's "Certainly Certifiable" blog post , which argues that the Sis should be certified.

Andy Klee's recent standout piece first published on SAP Toolbox, SAP Certification: Does it Matter? , is very well researched and current.

Marilyn Pratt's SAP blog entry triggered by Dennis Howlett's "Should You Be Certified". Would You Take Training From This Man

There is a blog in the AZ SAP consultant community fueled by this article Certification Drive for SAP Consultants

11. Web Resources

- http://www.sap.com/services/education/certification

- https://lod.sdn.sap.com/index.jspa

- http://www.sdn.sap.com/irj/bpx/education

- http://solutionbrowser.erp.sap.fmpmedia.com/

- http://help.sap.com/printdocu/core/Print46c/en/Data/Index_en.htm

- http://it.toolbox.com/wiki/index.php/Useful%5FSAP%5FWeblinks

- https://www.sdn.sap.com/irj/sdn/sapmentors

- http://www.twitter.com/SAPMentors

12. Author Biographies

Dennis Howlett (Twitter @dahowlett)
 Dennis is a 30+ year tech veteran who grew up in the punch card days, saw the advent of client/server and now follows 'the cloud.' Most of his experience has been in and around finance IT on everything from the smallest to large scale global systems. Dennis was a partner in a British firm of Chartered Accountants for 10 years, specialising in IT and taxation. He has been in and around SAP since 1994 and was appointed an SAP Mentor in the fall of 2007. In 2009, he was named a Top Contributor. Dennis holds a double 1st in psychology and sociology from the University of Leeds. You may contact him via email at dahowlett@gmail.com
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Martin Gillet (Twitter @MGILLET)
 Martin is an SAP-certified HR consultant (SAP 3.0d up to ERP 6.0) who works freelance on international projects. Martin has also been proudly an appointed SAP Mentor since 2009. He graduated with honors in Human Resources Management from Belgian Haute Ecole Namuroise Catholique (HENaC). Martin has worked with SAP R/3 since 1997 in the chemical, catering, pharmaceuticals, telecommunications, food, banking, and oil industries. He has focused on SAP HR since 1998 and has other SAP expertise including XSS, LSO, E-Recruiting, CATS, Reporting, Authorizations, and SAP NetWeaver Portal. You may contact him via email at martin.gillet@cogilius.com
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Michael Koch (Twitter @pixelbase)
Working in IT since 1990, Development Consultant and SAP Mentor Michael Koch has been involved in the SAP arena from 1997 onwards. Michael worked on numerous national and multinational SAP projects. His main areas of expertise are custom SAP Development, SAP Web Development, Data Migration, Interfaces, SAP CRM and most recently SAP Composition Environment (CE). Since 2004 Michael works as independent SAP Development Consultant. He conducted a survey about "Contractors and SAP Certification" during March/April2009. Michael also blogs about interesting things in "SAP Land" - go to www.pixelbase.co.uk to see more.

Leonardo De Araujo (Twitter @leonardo_araujo)
 Leonardo Araujo has more than 12 years of SAP experience and additional 6 in Business. He started as a functional consultant in SD, LE and later became also a ABAP developer. He has been working as development team lead or functional consultant, depending on the project. Now he is working mainly on Retail projects. He is certified in both ABAP and SD and has been very active in the SAP Community SCN, becoming a Mentor in 2009. He is was the leader on the project ABAP Report Wizard , downloaded more than 3000 times so far and he has presented sessions around ABAP development at SCN day Vegas 06' 07' 08' ,Inside Track 09 in Palo Alto and ASUG/SAPphire 2008. He is scheduled to present at the upcoming SAP TechEd 2009 in Phoenix. He works for Beyond Technologies, a Canadian consulting company based in Montreal Quebec.

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Jon Reed (Twitter: [@jonerp](#))
  Jon Reed is an independent SAP analyst and SAP Mentor who writes on SAP skills and market trends. He is the driving force behind [JonERP.com](#) , an interactive web site that features Jon's SAP Career Blog and his podcasts for SAP professionals. Jon has been publishing SAP career and market analysis for almost 15 years, and he is the author of the SAP Consultant Handbook. Recently, Jon was named a "PAC Fellow" to formalize his contributions to PAC's SAP Services Research Program, and he is a frequent contributor to PAC's "Feeding the SAP Ecosystem" blog. Jon provides consultations on talent management and marketing strategy to third party SAP services and software firms. Recently, Jon was recognized as a Top Contributor for the SAP Community Network 2008-2009 in the Business Process Expert Category.