

Government of Nova Scotia: Fast-tracking ABAP Development

Applies to:

ABAP

Summary

Warren Clements is a Technical SAP Consultant for the Prodigy Consulting Group Ltd. He primarily works on projects for the Government of Nova Scotia, Canada.

Recently he spoke with SAP contract writer Catherine LaCroix about how he uses SDN daily on projects including creating and maintaining bills, forms, reports, and interfaces for all municipalities on the SAP platform.

Author(s): Catherine LaCroix

Company: SAP

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LaCroix: What was the challenge or "pain point" that motivated you to use SDN or BPX?

Clements: I was hired to be a Human Resources (HR) technical consultant and to do Advanced Business Application Programming (ABAP). Before, my experience with SAP included three or four courses I had taken in university. Since the technical resources in the province were limited, and the workload was extensive, I had to find other ways to get my ABAP knowledge-transfer. My first task was to develop an HR report. I was intimidated and I needed some direction. That's when a colleague of mine—the team lead, in fact—suggested that I take a look at SDN. I logged on, and from that point on, I've been using it daily.

LaCroix: What were specific things about that project that you went to SDN to resolve?

Clements: The ABAP courses that I had taken in university were just introduction courses; they didn't really prepare me for what was in the real world. So when I started, I was confused. I couldn't get anything to compile correctly. I wasn't sure how to get what I needed even though I had a functional spec. I wasn't sure where to find what I needed to get this HR report done. I went to SDN forums, typed in what I needed, and found samples and tutorials. Before I knew it, I had a program that I could compile. Without this resource I would have tied up other programmers' time on my team; they would have had to send me sample code. Instead, I got all that I needed on SDN.

LaCroix: What did you have to include in the HR report?

Clements: It was a report based on a complex organizational tree. The report had to include specific personnel information, such as the date the employee started and who was in what position at a certain date and time. It was difficult to do because I was just starting to learn the system.

LaCroix: What were you trying to achieve through membership to either SDN or BPX?

Clements: When I first joined, I was looking to find information that I needed. Our biggest issue is resourcing. So if I have a question, I would search on SDN before going to anyone on my team. In my opinion, self-education is the best way to learn. When you do the research on your own, you learn more quickly. With SDN, when you're looking for a question, you often get three or four different responses. You're able to look at all possible solutions and choose which one works best for you. But you can still apply those alternate solutions down the road if you need to.

LaCroix: Can you provide a specific example of a project that you used SDN to accelerate or improve?

Clements: My colleague (the technical lead) was on a well-deserved vacation. I was asked if I would take on the task of creating user exits within compensation management. I was responsible for the development of the "Guidelines" and "eligibility" user exits for the project. Since I had never been involved in user exits, and did not know the first thing about compensation management, I decided to use SDN to do some research. I started by discovering a post in the ABAP forum that provided a sample report that would allow you to locate user exits based on transactions. From that starting point, I developed the logic based on functional specifications.

LaCroix: In addition to the HR report you had to create, what other projects were aided by your membership in SDN?

Clements: I also had the task of creating a new infotype for the coordination of health benefits. We were sending the health-insurance carrier, Blue Cross, some data in the form of a flat file. A new infotype needed to be created to identify users who had medical benefits elsewhere. So I had to add them to this file for data analysis purposes. I queried SDN forums and found a step-by-step process on how to create an infotype. I then added the logic to the interface to include the data from this infotype into the flat file. With the aid of SDN, I was able to create the infotype, make the interface enhancements, and do the unit-test in one day – without having any prior experience in that area.

LaCroix: Which specific SDN/BPX resources (forums, blogs, Wiki, etc.) did you use?

Clements: In the beginning, I used the ABAP, General Forum and ABAP Dictionary in the ABAP development forums. I used them mainly to get ABAP code examples and troubleshoot any problems I was having. This gave me the fundamental knowledge to move into developing reports in HR. I then began to use ERP HCM (HR) in the SAP Solutions forums to get my HR questions answered. When I began working with the utilities module, I began using Industry Solutions General forums. I also began using Form Printing in the ABAP Development forums.

In addition to the forums, I like the blogs. I use them to keep up with trends and see what others have to say. I also use eLearning. I find the video learning so much better than just reading the text. You get to see someone showing you the steps of a certain process.

LaCroix: How does collaboration with other experts on SDN/BPX help you in your daily work?

Clements: In two ways: I ask a question and get an answer almost immediately. I also try to answer questions as much as possible, so that I contribute to the community actively. It's a give-and-take situation.

LaCroix: What company-specific business challenges applied when you first joined the community?

Clements: The most difficult thing here is business process. When you work in any government agency, the processes and procedures are very complex. The risk factor is always high and we're working with extremely sensitive data. Policies and procedures are key. When you're working with delicate data, you're always second guessing yourself.

LaCroix: You mean, personal data?

Clements: Yes, confidential data, such as payroll information. When it comes to policies and procedures, there are so many steps we go through to set things up and access certain pieces of information. There are forms and procedures that you have to follow, and it has to go through many people for approval. You're in the public eye, so you have to follow procedures carefully.

LaCroix: What is the overall benefit of SDN or BPX?

Clements: I've been learning so much from SDN. My confidence level has been higher since using SDN. If someone asks me to take on new tasks – even if I can't do it now – I know that, with a little bit of research on SDN, I will be able to take it on.

LaCroix: What else do you gain from SDN?

Clements: We have so many outstanding projects right now, that the sooner I can get one project done, the sooner I can move onto another. When you go on SDN, everything is right there. It's created, maintained and nurtured by people who have been there and done that. On SDN, the answer is usually right in front of me. When I find it, I'm able to get things done more quickly. That's why I always have my SDN window open on my screen.

LaCroix: Would you say that SDN has helped with your technical resources issue?

Clements: It's another resource in itself, like having someone sitting beside you. It eliminates the need for extra resources in my mind.

LaCroix: What is the key differentiator with SDN or BPX (over other communities)?

Clements: The layout of the site is very clear. The information is all there and that's the key thing about SDN. You're able to share your stories with other people and you're part of a large community of professionals – ranging from people who are just starting out to experts in their field. No matter your background or expertise level, you can be part of the SDN community, which is great!

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