SAP Education and Research Customer Profile: Implementing SAP Higher Education and Research at ISB

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Abstract:

The goal of this Education & Research Customer Profile is to showcase how SAP Higher Education customer Indian School of Business has made use of Student Life cycle Management. All information was provided by Ms. Janaki Ramachandram, Assistant Director of Academic Services & Administration (ASA) department at ISB. A special thanks to her for taking the time to participate in this profile which is also available as blog.

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Table of Contents

Introduction

The Indian School of Business (ISB) was the first educational institution in India which went live with the SAP industry solution for Education and Research in the academic year 2006-07. In the same year, SAP India awarded the first-ever "SAP ACE Award for Customer Excellence" in the category of Best Public Services Implementation to ISB.

In her article, Ms. Janaki Ramachandram, Assistant Director of Academic Services & Administration (ASA) department at ISB describes the process from planning stage to actual implementation of the solution and summarises the benefits and the challenges that the institution met during its journey. She provides valuable best practice experiences from the perspective of one of SAP's reference customer in Education.

Her article highlights that a smooth successful implementation of any software requires:

- Domain expertise
- Prior functional knowledge of software development
- Team work
- Planning and organising skills
- Step-by-step approach of implementation
- Users' buy-in
- Passion for excellence
- Commitment
- Ownership

1. About ISB

The Indian School of Business (ISB) in Hyderabad (India) represents a world-class business school in Asia. It maintains academic associations with some of the world's most prestigious institutions like The Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania, the Kellogg School of Management and the London Business School. ISB offers a one-year Post Graduate Program in Management for professional executives and has currently a student population of about 575.

Prior to selecting SAP' Student Information System (SIS), a local software had been in use. With the growing student numbers and the subsequent increase in the complexity of administrative operations, the existing software system came onto its limits.

2. Software Selection Process

In 2003, ISB decided to integrate its IT systems through a single Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) application. Major ERP software vendors were evaluated with the following objectives in mind:

- Provide a single-point of access to all organisational data
- Provide real-time data anytime and anywhere
- Implement collaborative and systematic operational management
- Improve service delivery
- Integrate data seamlessly across business units
- Automate business processes

The following criteria were used during this evaluation process:

- Product fit to the existing business processes
- Vendor service delivery capability
- Market share in India and abroad
- Cost
- Reference sites
- Implementation road map of the company and product
- Level of customisation required

3. Operational Complexity of Student Administration Processes at ISB

The academic administration of the one-year Post Graduate Programme in Management is taken care of by the (Academic Services & Administration) ASA department which is the main point of contact for students with regard to all academic matters.

Tasks within the day-to-day operations of the department include e.g.:

- Scheduling the Academic Calendar
- Maintaining Student Records
- Class Scheduling
- Allocating courses to students
- Grade upload and viewing by students
- Monitoring of student progression
- Maintaining data confidentiality and security
- Ensuring requirements in concentration areas and for graduation are met
- De-registration of students after their graduation

The ASA needed a software solution to help manage its operations effectively. It was looking for automatic processing of academic and business operations in a single User Interface, allowing seamless data-flow for smooth functioning across various activities of the department. The focus was to manage the entire operations strategically rather than just operationally, so that stakeholders at ISB could use this data for strategic decisions.

After a thorough evaluation based on the selection criteria, ISB decided to implement the SAP ERP Application, SAP for Higher Education & Research (HE&R) version R/3 4.7 and the SAP NetWeaver Portal component to cover the complex requirements of its Student Administration processes.

An additional factor that influenced this decision was that, that SAP was evaluated as being very strong in Finance and HR modules, with a considerable market share and a huge presence in India and globally. An additional plus was that the solution portfolio supports a large number of organisational processes including campus management for student and academic services, grants management, the management of the student's academic lifecycle, financials, operations, human capital management, procurement, analytics, research, and asset management.

The need to use cutting-edge technology and best practices to deliver strategic information and improved service delivery were the primary considerations in ISB's choosing to implement SAP's HE&R module

4. Solution Implementation and Challenges

After selecting SAP ERP and SAP HE&R, ISB underwent a rigorous implementation process facilitated by SAP India and the implementation partner, Caritor (India) Pvt. Ltd. The time-frame for the back-office implementation including Human Resources (HR), Materials Management (MM), and Financials and Controlling (FICO) was close to six months and the implementation of SAP HE&R took a further six months. It represents one of the fastest implementations of its kind on record.

Though the SAP HE&R module supports Campus Management and Student Lifecycle Management functions, its vanilla implementation provided a direct fit to only some of the required functionalities. For example, it did not provide the reporting functionality required by the Academic Student Administration.

After carefully studying and comparing the delivered functionality to ASA's long-term requirements, the core implementation team members built the required reports and architected the product implementation structure accordingly. The implementation strategy contained a detailed design and followed a business process oriented implementation, thereby ensuring its successful implementation and end-user buy-in.

4.1. Committees

The core team members were nominated by the heads of functional departments. The ISB implementation team, working with the implementation partner, developed the detailed project scope and design. The implementation partner prepared and submitted the detailed time-lines and the project plan.

The following committees were formed to ensure efficient execution of the project:

- Core Team Committee – Core team members nominated by ISB business units
- Project Team Committee – Core team members, project manager and functional consultants from the implementation partner
- Steering Committee – top management at ISB, representatives from implementation partner and SAP India.

4.2. Fit-gap Analysis and Strategy for Implementation

Detailed process documents were prepared. A fit-gap analysis was conducted by the implementation partner in consultation with the end-users of each department based on which the customisation requirements were finalised.

To systemize and automate the functional processes at the school level, a phased implementation approach was applied. Customisation of the product was done in phases to effectively manage change for the end-users. Each module was rigorously tested pre-production, concluding with a user acceptance test before go-live.

4.3. Reviews

Weekly meetings/conference calls with the implementation partner along with the Project Manager and the core team members were arranged to review the progress and to ensure that problems pre- and post-production were triaged and resolved in an expeditious manner.

The project team reviews included:

- Daily meetings of core team members until the finalisation of the blue print
- Weekly project review meetings with the entire project team to address any concerns and teething issues
- Monthly steering committee reviews to monitor the progress of the project and guide the implementation team accordingly

4.4. Implementation Approach

The team worked in a cooperative manner to ensure the successful implementation of the project. After the project went live in 2006, the final grade sheets for the class of 2007 were taken from SAP HE&R with the minimum requirements that are essential to run one full cycle of academic activities related to students. A role-based access to the system was put in place to maintain data confidentiality and security.

After go-live, training sessions were conducted for the entire department, to increase end-user comfort in using the new system and minimise resistance to change.

A detailed but simple user manual was prepared in such a way that a new or an untrained user could also operate the system without much assistance.

4.5. Key factors in successful implementation

Given below are some of the major factors which have contributed to the successful, effective and timely implementation of the project:

- A team leader with prior experience in the related business processes and software development was made the primary owner for the customisation and implementation of the product and was responsible for final decision making.
- Much time was spent on requirement-gathering and fit-gap analysis to maximise the solution benefit and minimise the need for customisations.
- Regular coordination and communication between departmental teams, project teams, the steering committee and the implementation partner through personal meetings and teleconferences ensured the successful and timely implementation of the project.

5. Benefits of SAP HE&R implementation at ISB

The benefits realised through the successful implementation of SAP HE&R include:

- A single User Interface for the department's data with complete access controls:
  - Students' master data flows from the admissions department to the Academic Services & Administration department. The relevant data from the master data is also used by the finance department, thereby reducing the delays in transaction processing.
- Improved service delivery to all stakeholders, including students:
  - ASA's dependence on the IT team to release the grades through the legacy system was eliminated. By releasing grades through SAP, confidentiality is ensured as only one person is involved in uploading of grades from ASA and significant time is saved because there is no need for communication with the IT team to do so. As soon as grades are released in the system, students can view their grades in the SAP Portal.
- Administrative hassles are reduced and core business processes are improved with the implementation of SAP. Students can view and print their own grade sheets as per their requirement.

ISB is currently exploring the option to migrate to SAP ECC 6.0 as new features have been introduced which would allow ISB to maximise the ROI on its ERP investment.

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