Podcast Transcript:
SAP BPX Certification Podcast with Mario Herger of SAP
Hosted by Jon Reed of JonERP.com
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Jon Reed: Welcome to this special BPX Community podcast. I'm your host, Jon Reed of JonERP.com, and joining me today is Mario Herger, the SAP Community Network Alchemist. Mario has been knee-deep in some exciting work on SAP BPX certifications. In this podcast, we're going to get the latest on how the SAP team is progressing on BPX certifications and also how you, the listener, can get more involved.

Mario, thanks for joining us today. For those listeners who aren't caught up with the developments on BPX certification, tell us the latest news.

Mario Herger: The latest news is that we now define five tracks for the BPX certification, and we now have one of those tracks filled with classes. We are going to announce at the upcoming TechEd in Las Vegas that the track we have filled with classes is the so-called SAP Business Process Management Certification for BPX, with classes around the Business Process Management area. Classes in this curriculum are, for example, about BPM methodology, BPM governance, some basics about BPM, and BPM technology tools that you can use for that.

Reed: That's great stuff. The BPX certification mirrors the three-tiered SAP certification structure, right? There's an Associate's level, a Professional level and a Master's level to follow?

Herger: Exactly. It's following this structure, the three tier level, but it will not be like a traditional certification in that you go through these classes within two or three weeks; it is a little more extensive, it is an elite program. We have five tracks: in each track you need a certification, and all those tracks together lead to one BPX certification at an associate level.

Reed: That makes sense. Right now, you've fleshed out one of the tracks, which is the BPM for BPXers track, and you're going to be fleshing out the other four. You have the associate's level for the BPM and also the professional level for the BPM, is that correct?

Herger: That's right, we have the associate level and the professional level. The master level will follow a little bit later; we have to work on that as well. Inasmuch as the BPM track is concerned, we have four additional tracks. We got that out of the discussion with the community and with our internal experts. For example, we have so-called basics that you need to know, like entering business scenarios, starting with order-to-cache process or hire-to-retire so that they understand some fundamentals.

Then we have knowledge that you should acquire about application solutions and industry knowledge. If you come from one area, it's good to learn about others, so this is included in the curriculum as well.

Another track focuses more on the technologies behind this stuff: software and IT knowledge you should know about, like Business Intelligence System, XI, and portals, to understand the whole architecture and be able to guide and lead and build the architecture. Did I already mention BPM

certification for BPX? Everything about Business Process Management methodology, Solution Manager overview, Enterprise SOA, everything that is available in this context.

The last track, which is often underestimated, is soft skills and experience. This is an important point for us because we think the BPX certification is not a program you do right out college. You don't go through a three-month boot camp and you're a BPX associate. No, we expect you to have three to five years of experience; you've gone through your first projects, you've seen that you need knowledge from other sides and you've also seen challenges that came up in such projects.

These challenges often include soft skill gaps that people need to fill: leadership; knowledge about diversity in teams, especially in such global environments that we're working in; communication skills, not just bringing over your message, but being able to really communicate and get your point across is necessary for everybody. That's something we want to more or less bring into the program.

Reed: Good stuff. Before we get further into this, can you tell us why we need a BPX certification in the first place? How would this certification, properly implemented, help the SAP ecosystem?

Herger: We know from reports from different groups who mentioned that, of the IT projects in the U.S., only about 34% of those are seen as successful in the industry. That means, obviously, 66% of IT projects are either failing completely or they are late or over budget. That's why we have the BPX here, to come in and help bridge the gap between business users and developers, and to be the so-called "marriage counselors" (and I am quoting a colleague from SAP who coined that phrase).

We estimate that we are losing six billion dollars in the U.S. alone due to unsuccessful IT projects, so there should be a demand for BPX. And bringing in BPX, certifying BPX and showing that somebody has gone through all these five tracks and learned how they can help make an IT project successful – I think this is a good point to bring in certification.

Many people that we've spoken to are coming either from the development side and have all this interest in the business side as well, or you have people coming from the business side but they have done a lot of technology consultation to bring us these business requirements on a technology level. People consulting with large customers, many customers – I think they feel they do have a skills gap, and they want to complete certification to help them assume this role. That's why we are offering that curriculum, that path they can follow. At the end of that path, they should have the knowledge. They should be able to say, "I can do that now. I'm really here to help my customer, my company."

Reed: There's also been some discussion that validating the BPX area with a formal certification will also put a higher level of prestige and importance on these skills in the eyes of customers as well.

Herger: Definitely. We are standing behind it, we are not taking that easy. For us, BPX is an important next step for a professional in this industry. You may already come from a certain area, like a developer, business user, consultant, configurator and so on, and then you see you need more. So this is really a track and education curriculum that shows that you have moved beyond the initial phase of your professional career and that you are going into much more challenging and interesting areas.

Reed: Mario, one of the challenges I'm sure you've faced is this whole issue of which components comprise a BPX skill set. I've seen lists in the past that included different things that didn't make the cut for the top level of the five tracks that you're looking to validate. Did you have a lot of debate and discussion about how you fit everything in? I've seen everything from Web 2.0 skills to Six Sigma skills. There's a lot of ground to cover here, how did you prioritize these different tracks and fit everything in?

Herger: You're right. Many people expect revision, and wherever they see gaps, they try to put in stuff – all valid entries, of course, and a lot of experience that people have. We had discussions initially started in the BPX world and we asked our users, our community, what they understand, where the gaps are today. And they made a lot of suggestions about how they see that, and they gave really extensive answers. People took a lot of time to phrase their ideas, which also showed us they're interested in it, they're passionate about it, they see this as a future curriculum path that is necessary and that there is a gap today.

So the initial document, the initial framework of ideas, was more or less built out of those comments from several thousand BPX users on our BPX web site. We took all those, tried to arrange them, prioritize them, put them into a framework so that we finally phrased those five tracks. Then we also made targeted approaches to experts like you, Jon: we spoke to you and many others in the industry we identified as people who see themselves in BPX or see themselves as analysts or gurus who can give advice on that.

Also, internally we spoke to education because they own the curricula within SAP, and we asked their advice how this approach should be cut and sliced. And we then talked with other experts, people that we know, our own consultants, our own regional implementation groups and so on, ran votes on those things. In the end, what we have now is our first framework, our first certification component and ideas of where we should go with it.

The challenge that we face now is that because of this unique role, this unique scope of the BPX, we see that many of those classes are not offered by SAP education. Traditionally, we do not offer soft skill training classes for external non-SAP employees, so that means we need to find training providers that can offer those to our BPX community. We need framework, we need to have guidelines of how we evaluate those external training classes and how we evaluate experience, for example. What do we say, what do we expect you to tell us in order to be certified?

And that's a very interesting problem. It also more or less explains why it took us quite some time to come up with something. But now we are on a good track to finalize the final four tracks and soon inform you about how to make that a complete certification.

Reed: That's quite a lot of work. For the individual, you talked about users and what gaps they see on projects where skills are needed. For SAP professionals, they're coming from all over the place in terms of skills: you have technical consultants looking at these issues and you have functional types. You talk about this integration happening, so it sounds like an SAP professional using the BPX community should maybe be going through the same type of evaluation. They should look at these different components, not only in terms of the certification but the hands-on evaluation of the gaps in their BPX skill sets. Perhaps they can use your framework here to assess these gaps and then work to fill them?

Herger: That's exactly the way we see it. We are, of course, aware that many SAP professionals who've been around in the industry already have at least some of these classes; they already have this experience, they already have that certificate. But then they see things that, up until now, they did not really tackle, or they failed to take those classes or didn't have the time. Now they see a need to understand those things, whether it's taking leadership classes or knowing more about the basic business scenarios.

Such a person may know how CRM works or how the SD module on the ERP system in SAP works, but they might not be really familiar with the basic standard "vanilla" processes behind that and what they are and how they look different in other industries. Only this one makes them complete afterwards: our framework, our curriculum, is a guide for them. What have I done, what do I know already, and where are my weak spots that I have to fill with classes and get the certificate?

Reed: That sounds like an excellent framework for some gut checks that everyone in the community can now take a closer look at. I wanted to ask you another question regarding the BPM component, which is the certification that is rolling out now. There's some confusion and question just in the BPM area because we see a lot of tools out there. In fact, maybe there's an overwhelming number of different modeling tools when you look at everything from the IDS Scheer tool set to the NetWeaver BPM tool that's coming out, and then you have other tools like Visio that is heavily in use and Intalio, which is an open source tool. With all that in flux and not one tool standardized upon, how does one go about the certification? Did you struggle with that at all when you were developing it?

Herger: BPM is an important part of the BPX certification, but it's only part of it, not the full BPX certification. You bring a good point, though. We have all these tools – the modeling tools that IDS Scheer offers, other tools like Visio, which is kind of an industry standard – which we do not offer as a training class from the SAP side, but it's something that we recommend taking and using for our BPX certification.

This is one of the struggles that we have, that we have to quickly find classes that we can offer globally but also recognize that in the industry there are tools used and skills necessary that we are not offering. In the BPX BPM certification, the BPM track has four parts: the BPM basics, governance, methodology and technology. Each of those smaller tracks now also includes several classes, depending on your skill level, to give you a good overview. Of course, we really focus more on the SAP side, but here we really emphasize, especially to the BPX, that you know how this works beyond SAP because you might be involved in a project where you need to integrate external, non-SAP systems. If you have Visio, for example, that's a great tool as well.

Reed: So the focus of the certification is to provide the fundamental methodologies and then, as you get exposure to different tools, it will all hopefully fit into that framework.

Herger: Yes.

Reed: Excellent. We're starting to run out of time, but I did want to ask you about the upcoming TechEd program because SAP certification has become an important part of this. How can listeners who want to learn more about BPX certification and BPX skills get more involved with this at TechEd?

Herger: First, TechEd is not the starting point. When you're finished with this podcast, you can go to the BPX website, BPX.sap.com. Just one day before TechEd starts, we have the BPX Community Day where you will meet a lot of people from that web site that are in the BPX community: people who participated, people who are very active there, people who worked on the BPX showcase there to try to make a scenario walk-through of dialogues between comic figures with a business problem. TechEd itself will have a BPX track available, so there will be demonstrations, presentations, and hands-on sessions about the tools that have been part of the certification.

And you're always invited to visit us at the BPX web site, participate in the forums, participate in the wiki with the community working on those scenarios, helping to understand and to form and phrase those things. This is the place where we're going to talk about and roll out more information about the upcoming BPX curriculum: what the pieces are, when you can book the classes. Everything is more or less focused on the BPX web site itself. It has all the information that you need to start, and that's where you can follow the track.

Reed: There's a lot more we could say about BPX certification, but we've certainly covered some good ground today. Is there anything we haven't covered that you'd like to touch on or any final words for our listeners?

Herger: It has been a really challenging and interesting project working on the BPX and the BPX curriculum, and I think there are a lot of things still to come because we've only started with that. It's a pretty young area, and everybody who comes to a certain age, a certain period in his or her professional life, I think, should consider looking at BPX. That's where we're all going to meet.

Reed: Mario, thanks for taking the time and joining us today and we'll see you at TechEd in Las Vegas. I'd like to thank our listeners for joining us today for this BPX community podcast, and thanks again to Mario for giving us the scoop on SAP BPX certification. With that, this is Jon Reed from JonERP.com signing off. We'll see you online soon at BPX.SAP.com.