The Secret to Accelerated SAP Implementations: SAP Best Practices

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Finding an SAP solution package that's personalized for your organization, getting the solution up and running quickly, and controlling the total cost of owning such a world-class enterprise resource planning (ERP) system is a challenge for any company — regardless of size, location, or industry. Instead of needlessly reinventing the wheel in implementation and upgrade projects, customers can now tap into the wealth of knowledge of SAP's myriad developers, solution experts, and customers.

SAP Best Practices is a framework of proven content, tools, and methods — available at no charge to licensed SAP customers — to rapidly implement end-to-end business scenarios in a range of industries. Developed by SAP in collaboration with partners and customers, SAP Best Practices includes reports, forms, an automated installation guide, and other deliverables as a package that can be implemented right away.

This article provides an overview of the inner workings of the toolset provided with SAP Best Practices, and discusses recent innovations rolled out with the newest version that provide greater flexibility and further stream-line the implementation process.[1] You will see how continuous improvements

[1] In the context of this article, *implementation* means implementation of data, including configuration settings and master data.

developed in SAP Best Practices have resulted in a new product that blasts away limitations of the past.

What Is SAP Best Practices?

Frequently called "SAP's best-kept secret," SAP Best Practices is a suite of implementation tools, industry-specific preconfigurations, documentation, and sample data — available for free to licensed SAP customers. SAP Best Practices can jump-start your ability to effectively deploy business processes and components from SAP, all based on implementation and business-scenario "best practices."

To date, over 50,000 deliveries of these tools have helped customers of all sizes improve their business operations, decrease the cost of SAP projects, and provide an easier means to identify and contain project scope. SAP Best Practices can be used as a fully configured proto-type system to evaluate new functionality or ways of doing business, or as a starting point for an implementation project. For enterprises large and small, SAP Best Practices can provide tremendous value to any company using SAP applications and technology.

Preconfiguration: The Key to Reusability

SAP Best Practices first became available as part of a framework of SAP offerings focused on supporting implementation

projects, with a preconfigured system as the central deliverable. Starting in 1997, the preconfigured systems were delivered as configuration transports. Although this approach provided incremental time savings during implementation, additional flexibility was required to meet new business challenges:

- Users needed a new modular design that enabled them to choose the specific SAP Best Practices functionality they required

- For users to adjust the system to their specific requirements, variable parameters became necessary

- Implementation partners looked for reusable pieces of preconfigured business content so they could develop tailored solutions for their customers with less effort

Facing these challenges, SAP now delivers Best Practices versions with a revised technical design and new, distinguishing features:

- Easier methodology to select and implement distinct business scenarios

- Central maintenance of key parameters, such as a company's organizational structure

- A more automated approach to activating preconfiguration and personalizing end-user specific parameters

- Fully documented configuration logs

Such enhancements enable customers to fully realize the rich functionality of SAP solutions, with less complexity and more effective use of project resources. For example, after initial software installation, a project using the scenario scope provided with the SAP Best Practices solution for the SAP ERP Central Component (ECC) 5.0 could be fully configured, tested, and deployed — and running end-to-end business scenarios — in as little as three days.

A Drilled-Down Technical View of SAP Best Practices

While the goal of the new SAP Best Practices is to shield end users and the implementation team from the potential complexity that project team members may dive into, it can be helpful for a consultant or technical team member to understand the driving concepts and design of SAP Best Practices that make it a flexible, easy-to-operate enterprise solution.

The Building Block Concept

To enable customers to reuse their preconfigured solutions in other areas, or to use parts of a solution to create other solutions, SAP Best Practices developed the building block concept. Drawing on many years of experience in creating preconfigured industry and cross-industry solutions, SAP identified the reusable parts of solutions and encapsulated them in building blocks.

The main criterion used to define the content of a building block is reusability from an implementation point of view. A block can include all kinds of configuration settings or automated routines and is not restricted by its size. While larger building blocks tend to be more specific and therefore less reusable, smaller building blocks cause a certain development and administrative overhead. The optimal size of building blocks will vary, and the key is to find the proper balance between the potential for reuse and the complexity of administrative effort.

A Targeted Solution for Your Industry- and Region-Specific Business Needs

The SAP Best Practices suite comprises over 50 unique solutions, localized in many countries, spanning numerous industries, and covering a broad set of SAP solutions. Here is a look at some of the most popular SAP Best Practices packages.

Countries: SAP Best Practices Baseline Packages are available in various localized versions, including country-specific versions for Germany, the United States, the United Kingdom, France, China, Japan, Italy, and many more.

Industries: SAP Best Practices Industry Packages deliver predefined business scenarios designed to meet industry-specific requirements. Packages are available for over 17 industries, including: Consumer Products, Wholesale, High Tech, Automotive, Industrial Machinery and Components, Services, and more.

SAP solutions and components: SAP Best Practices Cross-Industry Packages deliver predefined business scenarios that can be used either to enrich existing solutions or to extend new solutions, including: mySAP ERP 2004, SAP R/3 4.7, SAP CRM 4.0, mySAP SCM, SAP NetWeaver 6.0, mySAP PLM, and more.

For a complete listing of packages, visit **http://service.sap.com/bestpractices** or **www.sap.com/bestpractices**.

With the building block methodology, SAP uses its experience implementing countless industry-specific template versions by combining them based on independently reusable pieces of functionality. With each SAP Best Practices version, users have access to a library of hundreds of building blocks, which they can browse through to find specific blocks suited to re-use in their organization's business processes.

Flexibility

The business-content-related flexibility achieved by the building block concept is complemented by the use of standard SAP tools like Business Configuration Sets (BC Sets) and the extended Computer Aided Test Tool (eCATT),[2] making it possible to modify individual data and settings during the installation process. Besides automating the technical implementation of SAP Best Practices, SAP also achieves flexibility

by using variable parameters. Variable parameters apply to settings relevant for personalization and localization (like organizational structure or country-dependent settings) and ensure the reusability of building blocks.

New SAP Best Practices Features for mySAP ERP 2004

Though earlier versions of SAP Best Practices successfully increased flexibility and reusability, the downside was a more demanding and time-consuming installation process. Take the example of a company with four plants defined within its organizational structure. These four plants were used in more than 1,000 places throughout its SAP Best Practices Baseline Package. Just imagine the extensive personalization that would be required if you wanted to change a plant number, especially if installation had to be done manually.

The new versions of SAP Best Practices for mySAP ERP 2004 accelerate installation and make personalization easy without reducing flexibility.

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[2] For more information on these standard SAP tools, see "Custom Applications and Standard SAP Solutions: What's the Difference When It Comes to Lifecycle Management?" by Franz-Josef Fritz in the January-March 2005 issue of *SAP Insider* (www.SAPinsider.com).

Central Data Administration

Continuing our example above, to avoid extensive personalization, ideally you could specify the plants centrally and link all the different places where plants are referenced to this one central location. With the standard eCATT tool used by SAP Best Practices,[3] this centralized approach to data administration can become a reality.

[3] For more information on eCATT, see Jonathan Maidstone's article "eCATT – The New Test Tool for Your E-Business Solution" in the July-September 2002 issue of *SAP Insider* (www.SAPinsider.com).

With the new SAP Best Practices versions for mySAP ERP 2004, configuration settings and master data settings are already integrated into the eCATT framework, and thus reach a consistent parameter administration where personalized data is referenced centrally from external,

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SAP Best Practices: Some Recent Customer Success Stories

☑ Capstone Turbine

In 2003, Capstone Turbine Corporation, a major innovator in energy-efficient power sources (microturbines) and an SAP R/3 customer, needed to move quickly to support a new business model and management requirements. The new strategy demanded a shift of sales to a mix of direct sales and sales through distributors.

To support direct sales and improve service, Capstone chose to implement key SAP solutions including mySAP Customer Relationship Management (mySAP CRM). To keep costs low and speed up project cycle time, Capstone leveraged SAP Best Practices. Using a defined scope based on the most commonly required business scenarios from SAP Best Practices, Capstone Turbine was able to fast-track their implementation of mySAP CRM, relying only on an internal IT team of three employees.

SAP Best Practices was a key factor in deciding to expand into new functionality using mySAP CRM instead of third-party products, enabling significant savings and accelerated ROI. Luke Pfaffinger, IT director at Capstone Turbine, notes, "I'd say we're cutting 30 to 40 percent off both project time and cost by leveraging SAP Best Practices."

☑ Watson Pharmaceuticals

While SAP Best Practices can be used to jump-start a project, companies can also use SAP Best Practices to quickly deploy prototype systems to demonstrate new features and functionality so the business can evaluate and assess the benefits. Watson Pharmaceuticals recently prototyped an SAP NetWeaver intranet solution to help evaluate how they could better realize cross-team collaboration, content management, and corporate communication.

A small internal team used SAP Best Practices together with the SAP NetWeaver Rapid Installer to create an SAP NetWeaver Portal proof-of-concept system that will enable IT to develop a roadmap and strategy for deploying a portal solution across the enterprise.

Within 15 person-days, a portal proof-of-concept system was developed and ready for evaluation, including connectivity with SAP R/3, SAP Business Information Warehouse (SAP BW), and third-party application integration, with the business scenarios for Sales Order Processing, Executive Cockpit KPIs, and Effective Communication.

☑ Danisco A/S

Danisco products are ingredients in half of all the ice cream and every fourth loaf of bread consumed in the world. A global market leader of food ingredients like emulsifiers, sweeteners, and bio-preservatives, Danisco started in 1999 with a transformation process to increase profitability through organic growth and acquisitions.

With more than 100 locations — including production plants, as well as distribution and research centers — in over 40 countries, Danisco needed an IT strategy for global information sharing to support the company's vision. In 2004 the Mindstorm project was started to streamline the global rollout of an SAP-based, company-wide solution.

By using not only the SAP Best Practices Baseline Package and Chemicals Industry Package, but also the SAP Best Practices methodology (including the "building block concept"), Danisco is ready to:

- Reduce implementation time and cost

- Easily set up the solution based on an existing company template

- Use scalable and easy-to-maintain standard processes

- Adapt to individual subsidiary requirements

- Create a common basis for global knowledge share

The goal of the SAP Best Practices-based Mindstorm project is to roll out the company template to smaller subsidiaries with two to three consultants in three to four months.

spreadsheet-like files for each of the different organizational items, for example.

User Guidance

To personalize and install SAP Best Practices, two "assistants" are available to guide the user:

- **Personalization Assistant** — Part of the SAP Best Practices documentation DVD, this tool guides you through (optional) personalization without having to be connected to the network. Based on the central files mentioned above, the Personalization Assistant offers a selection of parameters that can be changed according to the desired personalization activity. **Figure 1** shows an example: To personalize a company's organizational structure, the most important structural items can be depicted and selected in a graphical illustration. Here, clicking on a plant opens a table of plant data with change-able fields. All changes made in this table are automatically referenced to all relevant places during installation.

- **Installation Assistant** — Personal-ization and installation are two sepa-rate tasks, so the installation process is now always the same, regardless of whether or how much personalization takes place. As a result, close to 1,000 eCATT-based installation steps of a Baseline Package can be automated. The Installation Assistant is a system-based tool that manages the automated activation of the installation steps in the correct sequence, according to the building block structure defined during development. It keeps track of installa-tion status, interrupts the procedure for (sometimes inevitable) manual activi-ties, provides necessary documentation, and assures that the prerequisites for the installation are met. All the user has to do is press a button and follow on-screen instructions.

Outlook and Benefits

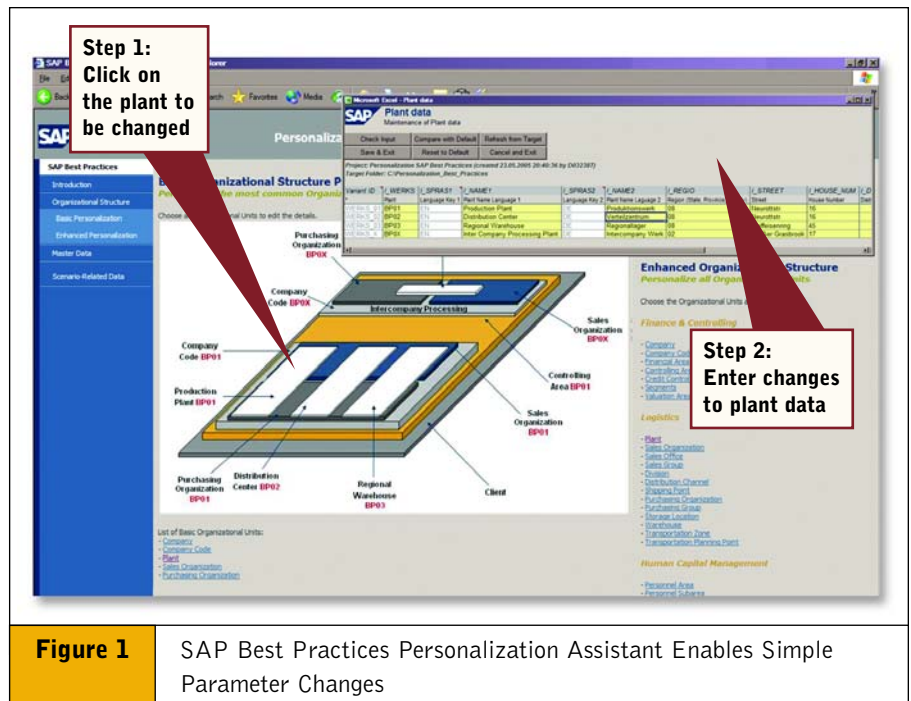In the future, SAP will further extend and stabilize cutting-edge technology

Figure 1 SAP Best Practices Personalization Assistant Enables Simple Parameter Changes

throughout new SAP Best Practices versions. In addition, data changed during the personalization of SAP Best Practices will be reflected automatically in the user documentation delivered for the respective business processes.

As a result, SAP Best Practices will continue to streamline the implementation experience for customers of all sizes and industries. The key benefits of using SAP Best Practices are twofold:

- Companies invest less time and effort conducting mission-critical project tasks, such as configuration, documen-tation, testing, and training.

- Customers lower the total cost of ownership (TCO) of their SAP systems. According to a study conducted by the Ludwigshafen University of Applied Sciences in early 2004, on average, the use of SAP Best Practices helped lower TCO by 11 percent. One company reported that, compared to conventional implementations, it deployed its ERP system 40 percent faster and lowered TCO by more than 53 percent.

For more information on SAP Best Practices, please visit **http://service.sap.com/bestpractices**. To see a complete outline of the

documentation included on the SAP Best Practices DVD — available at no charge to licensed SAP customers — visit **http://help.sap.com** and navigate to the *Best Practices* tab. ◼

Peter Neuer joined the SAP Best Practices group in 2000 and served as a project lead responsible for different industry and cross-industry SAP Best Practices versions. With the new strategic focus on the SMB market in 2002, Peter became responsible for defining the building block concept for modular development and reusability. Today, he is responsible for the SAP Best Practices innovation process, including long-term strategy, conception, product definition, and evaluation of new technologies.

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