

Podcast Transcript:

[Moving SAP ALM Into the Community: An SAP Community Podcast](#)

Hosted by Jon Reed of JonERP.com

Podcast Interview Date: December 15, 2009

Jon Reed: Welcome to this SAP Community Network podcast. I'm your host, Jon Reed of JonERP.com. Joining me today is Evan Stoddard, who is a senior product manager at SAP, and Michael Schwandt, who is program director with the SAP Community Network. We are here to talk about the emergence of application life cycle management and why it can have a real impact on the bottom line of SAP users.

Evan and Michael are also going to tell us more about why they decided to build out an ALM area on SCN and how we can all take advantage of the resources there.

Let's start with you, Evan. With TechEd 2009, SAP really started talking more openly about ALM. What is ALM and why do you think it can help SAP's customers reduce their total cost of ownership?

Evan Stoddard: There was a big push at TechEd: I think we had more than 60 hours of program content. There's a lot of confusion about the whole idea of ALM, and it's just starting to be rolled out. I see it as a real evolution of our support infrastructure and our methodology in order to excel our innovation for our customers, reduce their operations and let them build better quality and have better robustness and security of their solutions.

Really, if you think about it, we've had this tool set based on Solution Manager for almost nine or ten years now, and we've been adding functionality to this platform. We will see on the operations side and in the last seven or eight years we added implementation content so this could be used throughout the whole life cycle.

What customers were asking for was to have a better understanding of how to use these tools according to SAP's best practices, and to have standards for doing all of their key processes for application life cycle management and support according to IT infrastructure library or ITIL standards. What we have been doing is coming up with a whole methodology based on our Run SAP methodology for having support standards and also the tools integrated together into this offering for end-to-end Application Lifecycle Management. This just means we are building out all this information in a logical way according to the application lifecycle.

We had six major phases of this; for example, the requirements phase, design phase, build and test and going to operations, then on to continuous improvement, then any additional innovation going forward and lastly organizing all of the materials – the training, our services, the documentation and the actual way the tools are all organized in the Solution Manager platform so the customers can use them in an organized and holistic way to get a great return on their investment and lower their total costs of operations.

This is just what they've been asking for, for years, and we are really excited we can actually offer this now in an understanding way and publish all this information at our shows, webcasts and online content.

Reed: Solution Manager has a central place in ALM and, for those listeners who are still trying to better understand Solution Manager and the best ways of using it in an SAP environment, what is its role in ALM and how can customers tie Solution Manager into their ALM approach?

Stoddard: Solution Manager is our core platform where we execute these key Application Lifecycle Management processes. We started out with just a lot of tools and other capabilities: sometimes they were in the Solution Manager, sometimes externally, sometimes they were provided by external tools at SAP or maybe by partners. So what we have done is use this as a central platform and organize all of our key ALM processes and align all the capabilities.

For example, if a customer is looking to follow a lot of this ALM information for this offering, you look at the low-hanging fruit and what the pain points are if you've got some issues with change request management, if you're not happy with your service level management, if you want to do better at application incident management, etc. You can look at all of the information at the top level of the ALM offering as far as what processes you can follow, how this aligns with what roles in the organization should do these processes and that maps to the capabilities that are either inside the Solution Manager or linked to the Solution Manager – like we can do with, for example, third-party products.

For example, if you want to do test management, you can look both through the application life cycle manager to the road map information, find out what capabilities you can use right away and if you want to use a third party product. Then you can see that you can use, for example, the Rational Quality Manager, the HP OpenView or the HP Quality Center. You can actually use these in conjunction with our test workbench and Solution Manager system so you really have a holistic end-to-end test suite that can do everything for the enterprise. All the information is here telling you exactly how to run these processes, who in your organization should be doing what.

If you want to outsource any particular function, you can tell them exactly what to do following the information we have provided in all this documentation. Again, the Solution Manager is the core platform where we are bundling together all these capabilities as much as possible, linking all this information in the Solution Manager about the solution, maybe to third party suites if necessary, and giving the customers the information to actually realize that processing capability in the most efficient manner.

Reed: Michael, let's talk about the community side. It used to be that to find ALM resources, you needed to be on SAP's Service Marketplace, but now you've created an ALM resource collection on SCN and there are more plans in store for that. Tell us what motivated you to put ALM content on SCN and what users can find there.

Michael Schwandt: There are two reasons. One is that when we started SDN, the focus has been on techies, developers, geeks, and now we are expanding the audience to complete IT, to run IT as a business, to the operational aspect.

The second has been that if you go on Service Marketplace, you have to have an “s” user ID (you have to be a customer), while it is very easy to get a “p” user, or public user, ID on SDN. So we would expand the audience to more individuals working for partner system integrators, freelancers and even customers. By doing this, we are adding to the static content currently on Service Marketplace all the collaborative services like blogs, wiki and forums. For many of these products like Solution Manager, like enhancement packages, we have already had many forums, many blogs and posts and all that on SDN, but they were slightly disconnected. Now we are moving all that stuff to one place in one platform so it’s easier for the customer to consume it.

Reed: Michael, put yourself in the shoes of an SAP user for a moment. You want to learn more about ALM or SCN and maybe interact with other ALM users inside and outside of SAP, but you’re not totally sure where to begin with that. How would you begin that on SCN?

Schwandt: It could be two-fold. You either go on the ALM homepage, which is a little bit of a magazine approach for all broader topics so you can see what is currently going on, what is in, what is the feature blog, etc. Or you go with the search – you search for ALM or whatever you are looking for, and you get a list of related content, articles, blogs, etc.

The next step would be to figure out what the best is way for you to ideally write this down in the blog post or in a wiki to enable other colleagues, other peers in your industry, to share their feedback with you. This will help you come to a better way to use it and all these things; this is the idea of the community, to really align with peers in the industry and to come to small user groups in order to really benefit from the other guy’s experience.

Reed: I’ve definitely noticed that if you can put out a good blog post on SCN on a topic like this, you generally get some really good comments from others in the community, so that’s one excellent way to begin.

Schwandt: Yeah, we’re still focusing not only on experts, because most people are not experts, but to go after even the intermediate and the beginners to say this is our problem, this is what I would like to learn, this is my current status in my project, and ask if there are others out there in the community with the same project status and the same requirements. Then you share the resources.

Reed: We will include a link to that ALM homepage in our description. SAP seems to be taking some pretty strong steps to involve customers in a number of new product rollouts. Is that the case with ALM, and how are customers getting involved with this conversation? What kind of impact are they having?

Stoddard: As usual, we have been including our user groups in a lot of these discussions. The Americas use the group ASUG and also the one for Europe, the DSAG. We’ve also been getting a lot of feedback from these customer groups, but we wanted to actually extend this even further by having more feedback directly through the SCN. I personally think this is going to be a fantastic way of getting more information from our recipients, from partners, for example, from

customers on not only the whole ALM offering, but also on individual capabilities or any sort of information like that.

The idea is that we want to become more collaborative. We are putting more information out on the open web – on YouTube, for example, with a lot of our webcasts – and also on the content that we see on SCN. It really is opening it up, not only for the existing customer base, but also in the prospective customers that are looking at what kind of offering we have on the support side and services. This is all a very nice way of getting a lot of discussion going across all these parties.

Reed: Michael, what are you noticing about this interaction between customers and SAP on ALM?

Schwandt: What we recognize is that many of the solution managers are on a weekly or bi-weekly basis. They go into the discussion forums and figure out what the sentiment is in the customer area: what the feedback is, what's in, what's out, where are bucks. Especially in some areas like BSP, all the solution managers used these comments and brought them back into the architecture and decided, on this customer's feedback, to move these new features into the latest release and versions.

Reed: One thing I've noticed about your ALM team is that you've been really active in terms of blogging, giving webcasts, having a public face for the information you're sharing. Does the time invested in these kinds of activities pay off? A lot of us are struggling to figure out how we balance our internal project work with getting the word out about what we do. What kind of balance are you striking around that issue?

Stoddard: We're not just putting a lot of information out there for how to get started with the whole ALM processes and capabilities. We're also trying to empower the customers or the users that are looking at this material in order to make business cases. If you think about it, we're putting out a lot of information about what other customers are doing, we're having a lot of, for example, success stories and quotes, and also we're also going to be publishing jointly with IDC.

IDC is putting out a white paper about the ROI that Solution Manager can provide. We really want to have this information out there so that if, for example, an IT management customer wants to go and make a business case for adopting a specific Solution Manager capability, then they're empowered to have all of this other information. Really, what we're doing is making sort of an ERP system for IT: we're making a product that the IT organizations can use to optimize and to get better innovation and better quality.

We want to be able to provide enough information so they can determine that they may have to make an initial investment in implementing this capability and these processes, but this is a return on investment that they can realize and they can see this approach seems to be very successful going forward now that we're putting all this information out in a common location.

Reed: An ERP system for IT, that's a whole new development.

Stoddard: Well, it's really not a system, it's a product. We're treating IT like a real line of business; they are key to the customer's success, they want to make sure that the business processes, or the solutions, are operating in the most optimal way. We also want to do more or less reactionary monitoring and do more automation across the board so the IT organization can be more innovators and bring in new functionality to make their business run better instead of just being in reactive mode all the time.

This way, it's like IT isn't just a group that's a necessary evil for the customer, it's really a key generator of new applications to actually optimize the business. If we empower them with all this information and all these different forums, it just makes it a better value for the customers and lower total cost of ownership.

Reed: Michael, what do you think of that? That's a pretty big change in how we think of IT in an ERP landscape.

Schwandt: We support it majorly because currently the focus has been more on supporting these technical areas, how to implement that stuff. We addressed this with the people who already made the decision. Now, moving forward, we are more focused on justifications, helping people to make the best decision, to build their plan before they make the final decision.

Reed: You've added some useful resources to the SAP community around ALM, but there is much more to come because you have big plans for spring rollouts of functionality. Can you tell our listeners what they can expect in the new year?

Schwandt: What we are currently planning is to offer dashboards for the community where you can build your business cases. You can use them to build your business case, you can get back to us and modify these dashboards, upload it again and share it with the community. These are the new things we're doing. These are based on Xcelsius and Explorer, so you can download the stuff, build your own cases with all the variables, which is all the boundary conditions, then really get the feedback of the other guys in the community.

Reed: Have you decided on a timeframe for that?

Schwandt: This will all happen before we go live in the left side navigation, and this is planned for February 1st next year. You can expect this in the second half of January.

Reed: Evan, you had a comment on that?

Stoddard: The big thing from the Solution Manager side in 2010 is a new version of the Solution Manager platform, which will ramp up probably the middle of the year. That is our new version that will have the latest, greatest CRM 7.0 system at the heart of it, so this will mean we'll have the very powerful message processing application that can be used for a lot of the other functions of Solution Manager: test messaging, change request management, incident management.

It will also have the latest NetWeaver infrastructure for monitoring and alerting, and new functions like end user experience monitoring. We're very excited this version will be out as well as this big push across the board for the ALM offering, so these two will go hand-in-hand for those customers that really want the leverage, the best of the functionality that we can provide in this year.

Reed: Before we wrap this up, I'm going to give each of you one more question. You can either address a misconception about ALM that you'd like to clear up, or you pick a point that you would like to emphasize with our listeners today.

Stoddard: A misconception we're seeing, which has been going on for some time, is that we are really only looking at the SAP landscape and not really able to support any third party applications that are part of the end-to-end support application. A lot of customers think, Well, we have a solution that's got some third party components running the business, but we can only use SAP's offerings and tools and capabilities, which is the SAP component.

But what we've been doing the last couple of years is opening up the whole concept to work with the entire end-to-end solution regardless if it's an SAP product or not. For example, you can include third party components in the projects, in the testing area and in the monitoring area. If for example, we don't have coverage in a specific area, we are able to offer some kind of integration with third party tools to make that work. But really we're responsible as part of enterprise support with the entire customer end-to-end solution, all the application. This is part of the holistic approach that we cover as much as possible, but it is tied to the customer's business processes and solutions.

Reed: And Michael?

Schwandt: I would like to invite the members to use the time before February 1st to write about their project, about their duties, and about their requirements, using the new blog category called Application Lifecycle Management and get it started as soon as possible. Reach out to us, reach out to the other guys, share your problems with it and wait for the feedback. We have a committed team, we have a committed community, and you will get something back.

Reed: For our listeners: when you're posting a blog entry, you can select a category, so make sure you select ALM when you're posting in this area and that will put you in touch with other people who are tracking that.

Thank you both for joining us today and giving us an inside look at where ALM is headed and why SCN is becoming a focal point for these discussions.

Before we sign off, I'd like to make sure our listeners know how to access the Application Lifecycle Management area on SCN. I will include the direct URL in the podcast description. If you are not yet registered with SAP's online communities, you can register with the Developer Network and the Business Objects Community, the BPX Community, all at the same time and, once you're registered, you will have access to all of those resources as well as commenting on the topics that we have discussed.

On that note, I would like to thank our listeners for joining us today for this SAP podcast. This is Jon Reed signing off. We'll see you soon at SAP.com.