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## Podcast Inside SAP S/4HANA - Transcription

Inside SAP S/4HANA Episode 96: Fourth Anniversary Special Episode - Diversity and Individual Journeys to a Product Management Organization



**Fernanda:** Hello everyone. Welcome to the podcast Inside SAP S/4HANA. I'm Fernanda Rodrigues, the host of this very special episode, because today we want to celebrate the fourth anniversary of the podcast Inside the SAP S/4HANA. If you listen to us for some time already, you know that since 2019 we have published around 130 episodes, and in these episodes we like to talk to SAP partners, customers and also colleagues to understand the full journey through SAP S/4HANA Cloud. Also the challenges they face, the solutions and how SAP has supported that. But every time we celebrate an anniversary, we like to have a topic out of order, something that sparks your interest and also allows us to have some fun to discuss other relevant topics that maybe also somehow impact your projects and your work. Today then we will talk about diversity and individual journeys to a product management organization. For that, I invited some of my colleagues from our very diverse team at SAP, and when we want to talk about diversity, I think nothing is better than having this mix of cultures, also different backgrounds and so on. So I think the best way to start this episode is asking you, my colleagues, to introduce yourselves. Then our audience can already connect you with your voice. Yannick, go for it.

**Yannick:** Yeah. First of all, Fernanda, thanks a lot for hosting us and happy birthday to us. It's been a ride. We've started small, but we always had the vision, you know, to really get global sharing do's and don'ts from global implementation, smaller implementations. But we said at every birthday we should do something that is off record. And I'm very glad that you can host us today to talk about this super important topic. I'm Yannick, have the pleasure to lead the enablement team or the outbound product management team for Cloud ERP based out of Walldorf. But I'm originally from Alsace, one of the most beautiful region in France. Then I moved to Paris for studies. Then I discovered SAP in Paris and I discovered that SAP had a beautiful headquarter in Walldorf, and after 2 or 3 options, I decided to go for 2 or 3 years in Walldorf when I was in mid 20s. And now I'm mid-forties and I'm still there and I love it.

**Talal:** I'm Syed Talal Hussain, you can call me Talal. So that's my preferred first name. To compliment Yannick, yes, Alsace is probably the most beautiful region I have ever seen, and we go there for drives all the time. About myself, so my journey began over 30 years ago in Pakistan and that took me to Germany in 2013 for my masters. I worked in software development consulting and this also led me in the end to SAP that I'm over here for over six years now, and currently I'm the product manager of sustainability and AI products. Funny thing is how life works, right? So my speech about sustainability at my graduation in 2021 from MBA, in this speech I talked about sustainability, and it was more in the direction of how we should leave the world in a better place, where we are right now, and how everyone has a responsibility towards the world. And this speech actually caught the attention of the SAP management, including my manager, Yannick, of course, who was very supportive and said to me, basically, Talal, we have this upcoming LOB product manager position, would you like to take it? And from there onward, I'm the product manager of sustainability. That goes on and on and also AI goes in the same direction. I've been doing this for almost three years now. A bit about my personal life. So I just became a dad this year, and we celebrated my son's six months birthday with a pumpkin photoshoot. Apparently it's a Halloween trend I didn't know existed. So life is full of surprises, isn't it? That's it from my side.

**Sang:** Thanks, Talal and thanks, Fernanda for inviting me today. It's great to be here. My name is Sang Dao. I come from Vietnam. I started my journey with SAP back in 2019, taking on various roles like business intelligence and internal consulting. Currently, I'm working in product management with the team Yannick and colleagues and my focus area is on procurement and retail industry. I chose the tech industry, and because I truly believe that this is where I can make a positive impact and improve everyday life business. And I'm very passionate about delivering the best user experience and bringing automation to every project that I work on and turn them into success stories. A bit about my personal life. I love hiking and I love different sport activities, and in my free time I organize many sport events in the city where I live, Mannheim. It's nice to be here.

**Shuge:** Thank you, Sang. Also, thank you, Fernanda, for inviting me today to celebrate our fourth anniversary. And I'm Shuge Guo, come from China. About 11 years ago, just eight months after giving birth to my son. My whole family relocated to Germany and six months after our arrival, I started my career in SAP headquarter and time flies. I have been working for more than ten years in SAP, and over the last ten years I experienced various teams working on different SAP products under different managers and also within different cultures. Three years ago I joined Yannick's team. Joining this team has proven to be the best decision which I have made for my career in SAP. And thank you.

**Fernanda:** Nice. Thanks to all my colleagues for introducing yourselves. Also to give the audience a bit about my background. And Fernanda, I came from Brazil and moved to Germany like two and a half years ago. Back to Brazil, I worked for big media companies in communication field, and I also had a chance to work for two of the most diverse events around the world, I would say, in 2014 for FIFA World Cup and then 2016 for Olympic Games, and exactly, in the Olympic Games, my life completely changed. I met Daniel, he's German, and then some years later we decided to move together. And then that's why I'm here in Germany now. I joined SAP one and a half year ago, and as my colleagues here, I bring with me this background that has diversity in my professional side, also my personal side, and also with this very diverse team. Let's move to our topic. For sure, diversity is a hot topic in the tech industry. More than ever, the companies are talking about how diverse teams are more innovative and of course, also successful. But as usual, we know in theory everything sounds much better than in practice. So I want to challenge a bit Yannick, as a manager. You have almost ten nationalities in the team. If I can be blunt, do you believe diversity really is this magic bullet that everyone says it is? Shouldn't managers maybe just focus on results, whether the results come from one social group or 100 diverse?

**Yannick:** Fernanda, I don't only believe it, I just know this is the best thing you can do for an organization. You said you know, in theory, it all sounds good. You need to be diverse and inclusive. But what does that mean concretely? As I said in my introduction, I've been blessed with more than two decades working for SAP. And of course, I've seen many managers, many teams, many organizations. And at a time, doesn't matter if it's in France or in Germany or... A certain time where we're in a very strong team with individuals with a very similar profile. Many of them had a PhD in physics, actually. So if you would sum up the total of the IQ of the people, you would really be amazed. But I noticed that of course, many coming actually from a similar universities there were formatted the same way and thought the same way. And often you would ask a questions and many would agree, which

leads to very short discussions, questions, answers. Let's do it. And then I was on other teams like this team today where you noticed that when there are questions, we'll get ten answers? And in France we used to say, if you ask one questions, you get 60 million answers. I think this is a blessing for a team as well, because of course the communication might be longer, sometimes challenging, but the outcome, based on what I've experienced in different teams, you know, with the former PhDs that are super sharp and the more diverse one, I noticed, I measured that the outcome was greater on the second kind of team.

**Fernanda:** I like very much this perspective of bringing together people from different backgrounds, skills and experience. I think that's exactly what we need nowadays to develop technologies that are more connected with the needs and interests of a wider range of people. And now I want to hear from my colleagues. So in what ways do you think diversity impacts the outcomes of your project? So have you personally experienced that?

**Shuge:** I can give you an example from my experience. Currently, I'm leading the enablement of product accounting, and the development team for this module is based in Shanghai, and being able to communicate and interact with them in Chinese has saved a lot of unnecessary time. And this is not only benefiting for our team, but also for their team.

**Talal:** My perspective is that when we are tackling global problems, we need global representation. That's the pie. So in my role as Product Manager of Sustainability currently at SAP, I'm constantly working with colleagues, customers and partners from all over the world. So for example, you'll be in countries including Spain, Italy, UK and Germany have recently introduced plastic taxes and I can proudly say that SAP with SAP responsible design and Production product, we have provided a solution to comply with these regulations. The level of global effort needed to stop and potentially reverse climate change can only be achieved when done globally with every stakeholder involved. Hence, diversity is dictating the outcome of our civilization. That's my perspective. We cannot implement localized individual regulations without local representation. That is why diversity in workplace is absolutely necessary in modern world.

**Fernanda:** Great. Fully agreed Talal. When you think here that our audience on this podcast includes SAP customers, partners, project managers and much more, and I'm sure at this moment they are asking themselves, okay, the topic is very interesting, diversity. But how this actually fits with my daily routine, with my projects, my implementation process? So what do you think? Why diversity is a valid topic and why should our audience discuss diversity inside its projects?

**Talal:** As I mentioned, when we are tackling global problems, we need global representation. A software product that has developed by diverse teams has one inherent advantage, and that is they accommodate for differences in cultures and how these differences translate into the code. Now this is the important part. It's not just about writing a document, it's also the code. How this difference is translated into the cultural understanding of customers, partners, where they come from, how to build up on that. Everything matters. Just like Shuge mentioned in the last question as well. Language is one such an important aspect that goes

in there. So a product made by, for example, Germans or French, however, it is for the local market that is for Germans or for French could work very well because you know the culture, you understand the culture, you understand everything. But now look at it when you want to build a product that works for the world, a software made by the world where everyone has a stake in it. And for a company like SAP with over 400,000 customers, this is exactly what we need. We cannot build this SAP global software in one country, in one region. It has to have global representation. And that's the only way we can achieve a level of localization that we that the customers actually demand.

**Sang:** I cannot agree more with Talal. I believe diverse teams are often better at problem solving because they can identify and address potential issues from many angles. And this definitely leads to a more user friendly and inclusive product design, which can increase our user expectation and satisfaction. In an SAP implementation project typically, it's a global or cross-cultural project, so diversity can really bring positive impact here. Team members with diverse cultural backgrounds can better understand and accommodate cultural differences in customer expectations and also their behaviors. So diverse team encouraged open mindedness and foster a culture of continuous learning, and I believe this leads to a higher level of creativity, innovation, which is essential in the ever evolving field of enterprise software.

**Yannick:** I can only double down on what you guys just said, right? And it brings me to my previous example too, with the, you know, the formatted guys super brains with PhDs versus the team that was much more colorful, where I noticed that the outcome was completely different. And it's about the perspective that you just mentioned, the different facet of life that comes into a working group. Of course, organizational performance is really linked for me to the sum of the individual skills that are available in the organization, right? It's just mathematics. And in my role, I carefully look for team members when I have the blessing, you know, to grow the team I'm asking for what don't we have on the team? More than what do we need? Because you need finance, you need manufacturing. But in essence, what do we miss? It can be any kind of skills, right? And your competence is a very rare experience that will enrich the overall experience. When we do something, something that simply no one else on the team has. And I think to make a difference and to outperform, you need a diverse organization. I think we all agree on that. It's about challenging status quo. It's about bringing yourself to the next level. Because if you were in this formatted box where all people were cloned and all the same and all super efficient, super performant, and you want to get pushed to the next level, and with this openness, you bring the entire team, the entire organization to the next level. And this push will very more likely come from the diverse crowd, and then the execution will be superior to.

**Fernanda:** Very interesting, the perspective you brought here now. And I think in the end, from a companies or projects perspective, it's not only about hiring diverse people, but also ensuring that the people stay and they have the sense of belonging at the team. And I think coming from different backgrounds sometimes makes us feel apart first. That's why I wanted to ask you, can you share any block you had in mind, or any cliché that maybe you brought up or heard somewhere and thought this could be a challenge, but then you overcame it?



**Talal:** So everyone knows that it's a cliché that all South Asians, that includes Indians, Pakistanis in the region, you know, they are hardcore techies. Sure many are. I started in the same way. So I did my bachelors in software engineering started in programming back in 2011, even before I graduated, worked in hardcore development. I was pretty good at it as well to be honest. Then later on went for the master's of Engineering in Germany, did the same thing development. But truly my heart was always somewhere in the middle, you know? So technical is there, management somewhere in the middle? You know, in a region, South Asia, for example, there are nearly 2 billion people. So diversity is a given for most. Later on in my life I had to make a decision, so I decided to go for my MBA. The reason is the world is expecting all South Asians are techies, you know. Let's work with this hypothesis. The world is expecting that. But I wanted to do what I wanted to do, you know? So I did my MBA, my business school was my second master's. Also, another bold decision, but I had to go forward with the way that I like, even though in business for years and years and people still assume that tech should be the main skill I bring in. It sure is, you know, I mean, it's over ten years of experience in there, but there is much more to that where I would like to explore and I would like to build up on it. And this certain label that always sticks to you is also a sense of the diversity challenge that we are talking about. And there's really not nothing right or wrong there. It's just the label that sticks that we're talking about as a good example.

**Fernanda:** That's a good point, Talal. I like very much when we have the chance to break up with this clichés or ideas that people have about us, or a culture or a country. And how did you work to change this perspective?

**Talal:** First of all, I think it's really important to understand that some labels stick because they are also kind of true. They surely have a lot of developers coming from the region, and there is absolutely nothing wrong with that. This needs to be clarified, you know, and it's not a complaint in any way. It's more like a journey. And also, if anyone listening in the same situation as me, my advice would be to stay consistent, build a portfolio that you can show, knock on every door at the opportunity will eventually present itself. Like in my case, I knocked on every possible door when I was switching to full time product management and with Yannick's open position in the current team, that opportunity worked for me. So someone out there is willing to bet on you, provided you have the means and substance to show it.

**Fernanda:** Really nice. Now I want to direct my question to Shuge. Because Shuge, you mentioned in the introduction that you had your previous experience working in China, and then shortly after your son was born, you needed to move with your family to Germany. And when I see your story, what I see is a colleague with an impressive professional background who faces this big move to a new country and now specifically as a mom also. So tell us a bit about this challenges you faced. Have you noticed any changes in diversity and inclusion over the years yourself?

**Shuge:** Actually, as a foreign working mom, I'm always facing different kinds of challenges. And last year I faced the biggest one in my life due to an accident. My son has a knee surgery and he's only a 12 year old boy, and on one hand, I had to manage his recovery

process, going back and forth every day between the hospital and rehabilitation center and also school, which requires a lot of time and energy. On the other hand, I was deeply involved in SAP EARL enablement with other two colleagues. So since this tool was newly released and required delivering many trainings and videos. So balancing both responsibilities was a really big challenge for me at that time. But fortunately, I did receive great understanding and support from Yannick and also two other colleagues. Sometimes they had even stepped in for unexpected tasks due to my demanding schedule, and I really can't imagine that how I can get through that period without having their understanding and support. And I really feel that our team is like a big and warm family.

**Fernanda:** Nice Shuge. I think you touched a very important point about this support network. I joined the event at the SAP some weeks ago for women, and there was actually a Brazilian writer there. Her name is Cristiana. She talked exactly about the importance of the support network. That can be your partner, a friend, someone from your family, your neighbor or your colleagues. But I think this is also a very important aspect of diversity, because people can't achieve big things if they are alone, if they don't have support. In case of women, when we need to be full time at work, in a position inside the family, or as a mom as some of us decide to be. So diversity is also about giving the support and the right opportunities for people in the same level, right? That people can achieve the same things. Now, I want to talk to you, Sang, because I know you haven't been working in many customer and partner projects before. I think diversity has, of course, this beautiful side that "uau" everything is nice and people bring different perspectives and backgrounds. But let's talk a bit about the challenges. What challenges do you see when you work in multicultural projects?

**Sang:** Yeah, for me it was always exciting to work in a customer project because I can really see in reality how SAP solutions can transform our customer business. And working on a multicultural project, especially when involving participants from all around the world, can present some challenges. Some of the challenges are misunderstandings and misaligned expectations, which can occur from differences in communications style between different cultures. You know, and I can give you an example. People in Asian cultures may use indirect communication to maintain harmony and saving face, while Europeans may prefer a more direct and explicit approach. So to overcome this, it's very important to maintain effective communication. Encourage team members to ask for clarification and provide feedback constructively. Building trust in a multicultural teams may take more time, but if it works, it's really one of the success factors.

**Fernanda:** That's true. I agree a lot with your Sang, especially in these different communication styles. I have the feeling in general in Brazil we also have this indirect communication, and it's interesting to learn about different communication styles and how we can be more direct and find a common ground, let's say. As a conclusion, I know we have a very diverse team. Of course, we are only a tiny part of it. We have colleagues from many other countries and we don't want here represent everyone, mainly because we are not discussing the whole reality. Of course here we highlight the individualities and we know this diversity is so broad that it's impossible to talk about all aspects of it. But to close this very special episode, what do you think helps the teams to be more diverse? And what should we still do? What is still missing?

**Yannick:** Fernanda, this could be a series of ten additional podcasts, but I'd like to pick one thing here. It helps me to stick to a cliché, which is French people. They spend a lot of time eating and, you know, dining. And I love that. Right? So I'd like to share an idea that we're regularly doing on the team to foster this diverse culture, but in a very concrete manner. Most people on our team, they love to sit together, you know, with friends. And we do that with colleagues, with recipes that colleagues would bring from home. Or we cook together, but representing the country or continent, the idea is very simple. It's discover your colleague when eating, sharing the food, the way to cook, the way to enjoy life. Because all this is an important part of the culture of many countries. And this is how you will understand the people living up to this culture. And obviously this time triggers discussions that would never take place. If you would talk about an upgrade from ECC to S/4HANA, Public Cloud or anything else. So doing this, you see different facets of your colleagues, of your team. You start to understand each other differently or better. And this leads to appreciation and appreciation is the step before inclusion right. And the outcome is a high performing team because you have all, you know, this non-coded elements like eating, drinking together, having fun together that makes high performing team. And we do it for one last reason. Very simple. Just have fun at work together.

**Fernanda:** Yannick, I think these are very nice closing words for this episode. You talk about having fun and for sure we had some fun here together today on this episode. Thank you, my colleagues, for joining us in this very special episode of The Inside the SAP S/4HANA. I'm very happy with this opportunity to celebrate this four years anniversary of the podcast with you. I hope the audience also like it. So if you are listening to us in different audio platforms, please give us your feedback, five stars, put us as a favorite, share with people who would also maybe like this episode. And if you want to give us a feedback, you can also write us an email to [insides4@sap.com](mailto:insides4@sap.com). I hope to meet you next time and don't forget to be Inside SAP S/4HANA.

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