



Inside SAP S/4HANA Cloud

Transcript Episode 137 Partner coaching for successful SAP Cloud ERP implementations



What every partner needs to know before starting an SAP Cloud ERP project.

In this episode of Inside SAP S/4HANA Cloud, host Alina Keilbach speaks with Sebastian Wödl, SAP Finance Consultant and Partner Coach, about the realities and challenges partners face when delivering their first SAP Cloud ERP implementation. Together they unpack the core elements that drive successful cloud projects — from Fit-to-Standard execution to structuring the initial system setup and strengthening customer involvement.

Listeners will hear how Partner Coaching provides proactive support that guides partners through methodology, scope handling, cross-functional topics, and the shift from on-premise habits to a true Cloud Mindset. Sebastian shares insights from real projects, common misconceptions, and the areas where partners often need the most guidance.

Want to explore the topic further? Check the show notes for the related SAP documentation and learning resources. Follow Inside SAP S/4HANA Cloud for more expert insights!

Shownotes

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Transcript

Alina: Welcome to the podcast Inside SAP S/4HANA Cloud. There is no customer success without product success and project success. I'm your host, Alina Keilbach, and today we are diving into a topic that is crucial for success in the partner ecosystem. It's partner coaching. We've all heard the stories, right?

A partner starts an exciting SAP cloud ERP project and soon things start to feel challenging. Maybe you have been there. Suddenly, a project in distress lands on the desk of a special task force team, and it needs immediate attention. The problem is, by that point, the project might already be in serious trouble.

And let's be honest. The first cloud ERP project is like stepping into a brand new game. It's not a traditional on-premise implementation. There is a fresh methodology to get your head around. You've got a three-system landscape, plus a central business configuration. And the functionality is different because the code lines are different.

And those mandatory six-month upgrades, they are great for innovation, but they require a totally different discipline. They mean a new rhythm for testing and analysis. And it's actually a paradigm shift. And it requires what we love to call a cloud mindset. And you can no longer stick to this is how it worked in the past.

That's precisely why our partner coaching service exists.

And today with me, Sebastian Woedl, finance consultant implementing SAP cloud ERP at our customers and doing partner coaching for our partners. The partners who are starting their first cloud ERP project. So, Sebastian, would you like to say a couple of words about yourself?

Sebastian: Sure. Hi, Alina. First of all, thank you for the invitation.

It's a pleasure to have the chance to talk about partner coaching in this format. About me, I'm working in the SAP industry since 2017, since the beginning of my professional career. I started at a medium-sized implementation partner as a finance consultant. In 2023, I switched to SAP, where I first continued in Adobe finance consulting.

Since last year, my focus has shifted to partner coaching, and in this role, I can leverage the knowledge I've gained in the SAP cloud ERP environment. 12 partners support their customers and ultimately drive SAP strategy to become a cloud company.

Alina: Sebastian, let's start with the challenges that the partners faced during their first SAP cloud ERP implementation. What are those challenges and how do you tackle them in your partner coaching engagements?

Sebastian: There are several topics we must address in each partner coaching engagement. To give you some example, one of the first topics we have to address in each engagement is the Fit-to-standard workshop execution. Of course, the standard workshops are a standardized component in the SAP Activate methodology, but it's not defining in detail how to prepare and execute them.

This is crucial because during these workshops, the data configuration items are collected for the realized phase. Another crucial topic is the initial system setup. This is very important because some scope items can only be activated during the initial setup, and activation at a later stage is not possible.

In addition, we notice that cross-functional topics are often underestimated. These include authorizations, migration and reporting. This is not ERP specific, but we still address them when we have the chance to

Alina: Sebastian, you mentioned activate methodology. Can you explain the key differences between SAP cloud ERP methodology and the on-premise version?

Sebastian: Traditional SAP projects are usually based on a waterfall methodology, which is linear and sequential. In contrast, activate methodology is an agile approach, still with sequential phases, but within these phases the execution is based on agile sprints. On top of that, the methodology contains tailored milestones and content for Cloud ERP. For example, the sign of the backlog and the already mentioned initial system activation at the end of the explore phase, or how to approach the half yearly release cycles.

Alina: So, the activate methodology actually supports the implementation from the kickoff until the go live and even after? And why is it important to involve the customers at the very early stage of the project?

Sebastian: First of all, Cloud ERP is a highly standardized software. More than any other SAP ERP solution, customers benefit from pre delivered content and processes which lead to faster implementation cycles, but this requires the customer to familiarize themselves with the standard processes and content.

Therefore, the involvement of key users is crucial for the success of the implementation. Typically, a lack of customer involvement leads to extended test and hyper care phases. In partner coaching, we emphasize the importance of customer involvement and sales enablement, which is crucial for activate success.

But to be honest, it still remains a typical project challenge.

Alina: And you say that the partner coaching is actually adapted specifically based on the partner and the customer and the project requirements. Can you give us more insights on how you're working with the partners during this engagement?

Sebastian: Sure. What makes partner coaching unique is its proactive and continuous approach. We don't wait until something goes wrong. We act more like a navigation system for the partners to have the best possible impact. We ideally start a collaboration at the beginning of the explore phase. Usually, we align on regular calls to proactively address current topic depending on the project phase, and continuously build a reliable cloud mindset together.

It means that the partner coaching involves regular calls to address the partner challenges and enhance the cloud mindset. Would you like to add something about the partner coaching, what it is and what it's not? Yeah, that's a very good question. So partner coaching is primarily methodological coaching for implementation partners.

We are not customer facing and do not work directly in the customer system. The goal is to ensure the right information is available at the right time in the right place. Partner coaching is definitely not free of charge consulting manpower provided by SAP. To return to the metaphor, the partner remains in the driver's seat, but we provide the route to a successful Cloud ERP implementation.

and you are driving all together to the successful implementation and go live.

Alina: We've already heard about that cloud mindset couple of times today. Can you elaborate on that concept and why is it important to leave behind the old on premise way of thinking?

Sebastian: Essentially, the cloud mindset means customers should build as much as possible on standard functionalities. However, partners with the long-term on-premise experience tend to propose developments and extensions much faster, as they should. This collides with the cloud mindset and can lead to negative impacts, such as additional effort during implementation and the recurring release cycles.

Therefore, we continuously highlight the need to build a strong cloud mindset to ensure a successful implementation and long-term success.

Alina: Okay, can you maybe say a couple of words about the fit-to-standard workshops, how they are structured, what is critical and the cloud ERP implementation project and what is their clustering?

Sebastian: Sure to begin, the overall goal of fit to standard workshops is to define all the relevant configuration items for the realized phase. To achieve that goal, of course, every consultant has their own style, but what has proven to be successful is a short theoretical presentation, followed by a process demonstration in the starter system and in the end, collaboratively recording the configuration items in the backlog.

When I was preparing myself for future standard workshops, I was already noting down all the items I know I had to check with the customer without the risk of missing something. Regarding the clustering, functionalities are bundled into so-called scope items in cloud ERP, but these scope items do not always correspond to the process perspective.

For example, in finance there are many separate scope items, especially in asset accounting. It is the partner's responsibility to cluster these scope items in a meaningful, process oriented and digestible way. This is where we support during the coaching sessions.

Alina: Thank you for this insight, Sebastian. And now to put a fun spin on all this. It's time for my favorite section. This is the first five I'm going to throw out five quick quirky questions about our topic, and you should answer the questions with just one word or a short sentence. Let's go. What's one phrase you would banish from a public cloud project to sharpen the cloud mindset?

Sebastian: I have to go with this as working on premise.

Alina: What's the most common "Houston, we have a problem!" moment that the partner coaching helps to avoid?

Sebastian: Selecting the wrong initial scope and ledger set up during the system activation.

Alina: That's a very good point, Sebastian. We put the link to our blog in the show notes. If partner coaching was a movie genre, what would it be? A buddy cop film, a training montage, or a suspense thriller?

Sebastian: Yeah. Good question, but I think I would go for the buddy cop film as we are building a close relationship with our partners at eye level, which is even fun sometimes.

Alina: In the world of partner coaching, what initial hurdle often becomes the most rewarding challenge for the newcomers?

Sebastian: The first implementation itself. After that, you can leverage the gained experience.

Alina: And finally, what's the quickest light bulb moment you see when coaching a partner on the cloud ERP methodology?

Sebastian: Hard to say but maybe the fact that business role templates are not meant for productive use.

Alina: Thank you, Sebastian.

Sebastian: Thank you very much, Alina. It was a pleasure. I hope to talk to you soon.

Alina: Thank you for listening to today's episode. If you enjoyed the insights, make sure you follow and subscribe to inside SAP S/4HANA Cloud on Spotify or Apple Podcasts, so you never miss an update on Spotify. You can use our Q&A and poll features directly in the episode.

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