

SAP Learning Insights InternView



SAP Learning Insights InternView Podcast

Transcript Episode 056 – SAP's Path to Success:
Inside the SAP STAR program with Markus Bell

Join host Usaid in this episode of InternView talking with Markus Bell, SAP's Global Head of STAR (Student Training and Rotation), to explore the comprehensive world of SAP's STAR program. With over 20 years at SAP, Markus shares how this program has produced over 3,000 graduates, including two current board members who started their careers as STAR students.

Discover what sets this program apart and learn how they operate across 14 countries, offering students real-world experience through customer interactions while developing both technical and soft skills.

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https://jobs.sap.com/content/internships/?locale=en_US

Explore the various student opportunities at SAP: https://jobs.sap.com/content/Students/?locale=en_US

Learn how students can certify in SAP for free with [SAP Learning Hub, student edition](#).

(<https://community.sap.com/t5/beginner-corner-blog-posts/free-sap-certification-and-practice-systems-for-students-amp-lecturers/ba-p/14052493>)

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Transcript

Hello, everyone, and welcome back to InternView.

This is a podcast for students, by students, bringing you an inside look at SAP's Internship Experience Program.

Today's episode is hosted by myself, Usaid, and I'm excited to be here with all of you for another great conversation.

Interview is all about giving you great insights into SAP's world, the opportunities here for young talents, and what student life at SAP is really like.

So without further delay, let's welcome our special guest for Episode 2.

We're thrilled to have Markus Bell with us today.

SAP's Global Head of Vocational Training is here with us today to share his experiences and insights.

Good morning, Markus, how are you doing?

Hi, good morning. I'm fine, thanks.

We're very excited to have you here with us today, Markus. Could you give us a bit of background on who you are, what brought you to SAP, and what your journey has been like so far?

Yeah, I'm based in Walldorf, our headquarters in Germany.

I've been with SAP for more than 20 years now.

Currently, I'm part of the HR organization, which we now call People and Culture, and I'm responsible for several early talent programs and initiatives.

One of those programs is the Vocational Training STAR program.

Interesting. For those viewers and listeners who are not from SAP, could we delve into what exactly vocational training is and what the STAR program at SAP entails?

Well, vocational training and the STAR program are essentially the same; we just have different names in different regions or countries around the globe.

It's actually a program where, in close collaboration with universities, students can receive special education at SAP for two or sometimes three years, depending on the education system around the globe.

We hire students directly from university, onboard them, and they work as students for SAP.

We offer a lot of training opportunities, along with real-life experiences, which we call rotations.

This means students are encouraged to go into different organizations and lines of business during their time at SAP.

They get a very comprehensive experience regarding the company, our industry, and various learning opportunities within the organization.

After these rotations and onboarding, our ultimate goal is to convert most of these students into fixed roles at SAP.

So once you graduate from your master's or bachelor's program, you'll hopefully secure a permanent role with SAP. That's our aim.

Interesting. Thank you for that insight, Markus.

Diving more into vocational training, what do you see differentiates SAP's vocational training from similar programs in Germany?

In general, the basics are similar, with the same methodology.

However, it's essential that we invest significantly in our students and interns, and we have a clear objective—conversion is key for us.

We genuinely want to offer real jobs at the end of the program.

Additionally, we give students the opportunity to determine their rotations and internships, deciding with their trainers what their next rotation will be, their next step, and where they would like to focus.

This approach is truly unique at SAP.

Interesting.

A bit of a different question, but since you've been the head of vocational training for quite some time, could you think of any specific success stories of students who have been through the SAP VT program and how it has shaped their careers?

Absolutely.

Currently, we have two board members at SAP who went through the VT STAR program many years ago.

They began their careers with the VT STAR program, which is a great success story.

Additionally, we've seen many graduates achieve very successful careers over the past few years within the organization—on executive levels, expert levels, and in managerial roles.

Overall, we have more than 3,000 graduates from the VT STAR program actively working at SAP, and they are all very successful.

We've been tracking their progress closely, monitoring what happens to our VT STAR students.

We're delighted to see how they develop their careers independently and what they are doing nowadays.

Overall, I believe it's a truly successful program.

Interesting.

Two board members within SAP from the VT program—this just goes to show the success and importance of the VT program for those considering pursuing their VT training at SAP during their bachelor's or master's studies.

Markus, considering the future and the rapid changes in technology, which new skills do you foresee as essential for VT students in the coming years, especially with the rise of AI?

Yes, AI is crucial right now.

Everyone is talking about AI, and all the opportunities we offer are related to it, whether in development, service, or sales.

This topic is the most important and trending at this moment.

However, we must also consider our foundation.

We need to discuss big data, the cloud, and cybersecurity—these are all vital elements.

In our collaborations with universities and the subjects we offer, all the buzzwords I've mentioned are included in our curriculum and offerings worldwide.

The needs differ from country to country.

Overall, we must prepare our graduates to convert into real SAP full-time positions by the end of the program.

That is our continuous challenge—to stay updated and provide the right content while enabling students to develop themselves through various rotations.

This is crucial because these experiences build comprehensive end-to-end experience within the organization.

Absolutely amazing.

You recently mentioned that the VT journey offers a diverse educational experience.

How flexible is the curriculum for students interested in the VT program, and how do you adapt to emerging technologies and methodologies?

Well, we have two perspectives on this.

On one hand, we can't immediately change the curriculum offered by universities, as it evolves over time.

We can discuss changes with partner universities, but it takes considerable time.

Within SAP, however, we are 100% flexible.

No one knows precisely what will be needed two years from now, so this flexibility is essential.

Based on rotations and training, we can remain very flexible.

All learning assets available within SAP's learning landscape are accessible to our students.

They can flexibly choose the department they wish to enter, and thus the content they need, utilizing it during rotations.

This flexibility is vital to ensure success.

However, students must also be successful and flexible, or the model won't work.

Since no one knows exactly what is needed two years from now, we need this flexibility to achieve our goals.

Through these learning opportunities, students are supported by vocational training or STAR trainers within the organization.

They coach, guide, and assist students in finding their own successful path.

Thank you, Markus.

Regarding the mentors you mentioned, can you walk us through what a typical day looks like for someone new to the SAP vocational training program and how they integrate into SAP?

Certainly.

When you join the organization, the first four weeks consist of an intensive onboarding program where you train with peers and the community, primarily in a classroom-based environment.

We teach the essential skills needed to thrive at SAP.

Afterward, you transition to your first rotation in a specific department, which can look very different depending on the area—whether it's development or customer-facing roles.

In each department, there is a mentor, a buddy, who looks after you, focusing on your goals and learning activities, ensuring you make the most of your experience.

Meanwhile, the Central VT STAR Trainer supports you throughout the two or three years of the program, monitoring your goals and performance, providing regular feedback during what we call SAP Talks.

At the program's end, the VT Trainer evaluates your achievements and supports you in securing a permanent role at SAP. Sounds great.

Days can vary widely based on the work and area you're in.

In a typical development environment, you might not have customer-facing meetings during the day.

You work locally and globally with your team, likely having many Microsoft Teams conferences throughout the day.

On the other hand, as you progress towards later semesters and are closer to customers, you may travel to meet clients and participate in meetings.

Such interactions depend on the duration you've committed to this path and are possible as you advance.

Alongside your mentor and buddy, you're closely connected with peers and batch mates, focusing on community building to ensure you're not alone—sharing activities during the day and week.

This also means opportunities for team development and fun, both before and after work.

We emphasize that while students have working responsibilities, social skills and intercultural opportunities are vital for a well-rounded experience.

It's important to balance work with experiences that develop students socially and culturally.

It's an integral part, from my perspective, to focus on real-life experiences each day.

That's fascinating to hear, Markus.

I'm glad to see that the vocational training program offers more than traditional training by allowing students to actively engage with customers and focus on both soft and hard skills learned in the office.

Interesting.

When asked about what makes a difference for graduates who have studied in our program, most will highlight soft skills learned over the years.

These are crucial for success.

From my point of view, one crucial aspect is intercultural experience.

We've not yet discussed rotation opportunities abroad.

We offer top 10% of students the chance to do one rotation abroad in different countries or locations within the SAP organization.

This incredible opportunity enables students to work for eight to twelve weeks in a different country, experiencing work in a different environment outside their home location.

It's a unique aspect, focusing on intercultural experience, ensuring that our global work environment is reflected in these life experiences.

We work globally, and providing these opportunities allows real-life international experience at various locations worldwide.

Well, that's interesting to hear, Markus, about the international locations students can visit for short periods.

Is there a plan to expand the VT program to new locations, or is it already widely offered across SAP's existing offices?

Currently, we offer our services in 14 countries globally.

Big locations include our headquarters and major labs in India, China, Brazil, and smaller locations like Australia, Japan, and Ireland.

Our diverse portfolio reflects demand for early talents.

We determine location based on demand for early talents.

Where future demand exists, it makes sense to offer a VT or iXp program, ensuring we're close to internal customers and meeting their success needs.

Early talents are vital for SAP.

About 50% of all new hires have been early talents in recent years, showcasing significant investment.

Our pipeline programs, iXp and VT STAR, support filling this early talent pipeline.

Well, Markus, it's fascinating to hear about your personal experience.

What's your favorite part of leading the vocational training program at SAP, and is there something specific that brings you joy?

That's a great question because I love working with early talents—it brings daily purpose.

Leading a global organization is also rewarding, as you face different challenges, work with various cultures and perspectives, making every day unique.

Marcus, quick question for you—if you could give yourself one piece of advice at the start of your career, what would that be?

When I joined SAP, I was overwhelmed by new technologies, processes, and colleagues.

Having a good buddy from the start was crucial.

I maintain a great relationship with my buddy after all these years—it has been a journey together for over 20 years.

Such support was invaluable during my early days at SAP.

I advise anyone feeling overwhelmed to seek a buddy in VT STAR—someone two semesters above you—and raise questions.

Throughout the organization, departments offer helpers to support you.

Being curious and asking questions allows you to learn and move forward, so don't be shy.

No question is too small; asking helps you learn as much as possible.

Well, Markus, regarding vocational training—is it meant for everyone, or is it limited to students?

It's limited to students because part of the foundation is university engagement.

However, I wouldn't say it's the only channel for early talents to enter SAP.

We have pipeline programs, including iXp and VT, mainly for students, and many positions available globally for graduates and degree holders.

Approximately 50% of new hires have been early talents—you can find opportunities on our homepage.

Early talents are supported through special programs in various areas.

We have programs for sales, cybersecurity, and many more.

As an early talent, you have multiple channels to start your career at SAP.

Additionally, we have numerous programs to provide the best start within the organization.

Years ago, I was overwhelmed joining SAP, but now our offerings for early talents have improved significantly.

Thank you very much, Markus, for those great insights into the vocational training program.

Once again, for our audience listening—if you have more questions, feel free to reach out regarding the vocational training program. We'll be happy to help.

Markus, before we conclude the podcast, let's go through a quick rapid-fire round of questions to keep things fun.

First question: Are you an early bird or night owl?

Both.

Interesting. What's your favorite SAP memory?

Visiting my first customer as a developer was crucial.

That experience taught me the importance of listening to customers.

Interesting.

What one word would colleagues use to describe you?

Crazy.

If you could instantly gain a new skill, what would it be—a hard skill or soft skill?

Any skill.

Getting familiar with AI opportunities is essential from various perspectives.

First, it's important for early talents.

Second, using AI in daily routines and jobs is valuable.

Third, consider its relevance in your private life—I practice this with my children.

They're all school-age, and AI is pervasive, offering significant potential.

My favorite quick question: What's the best piece of advice you've ever received?

Network.

While working as a developer in an introverted team, a new manager taught me the importance of organizational and external networking.

This is why I emphasize networking as crucial to success at SAP.

Absolutely—a vital skill that everyone should remember.

Markus, before planning this podcast with you, I asked ChatGPT an intriguing question.

If AI could ask you one fun fact for its training, what would it be?

I'm a poor soccer player.

Being a German man of my age, it's expected to have played soccer, and while that's true, I'm not good at it.

Fortunately, I have other positive skills and competencies.

That's interesting, and AI would appreciate having that information in its training data.

Well, wrapping up our podcast—thank you to all listeners and viewers on various platforms for tuning in.

It was hosted by Usaid, and with Markus Bell, SAP's Global Head of Vocational Training. It was a pleasure having you here, Markus.

Thank you for your insights.

Remember, with the SAP Internship Experience Program, you're not just gaining experience but expanding your horizons.

