

SAP Learning Insights



SAP Learning Insights Podcast

Transcript Episode 060 – Career Spotlight – Becoming an SAP Consultant in Sourcing and Procurement with Akshay Patel

In this episode, David Chaviano discusses Akshay Patel's journey from electrical engineering to becoming a junior SAP consultant at Syntax, Canada. Akshay shares how his diverse experiences sparked an interest in SAP consulting, leading to formal training and certifications in sourcing and procurement. He highlights the challenges of entering the job market and the persistence needed to secure his position at Syntax. He reflects on his growth through hands-on projects and client engagement, while also addressing the role of artificial intelligence in the future of consulting. Akshay concludes with his words of wisdom for aspiring SAP professionals, emphasizing the importance of foundational knowledge, practical experience, and determination.

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Transcript

David Chaviano: Hello and welcome to another episode of the SAP Learning Insights Podcast. Today we're going to take a closer look at the career path to becoming an SAP consultant. With us today is Akshay Patel from SAP partner Syntax. The name should be familiar. We've had a couple guests on previous episodes, so maybe some Syntax members will be regular guests or in the podcast rotation. Akshay is a fairly new SAP consultant. We want to understand a little bit about him, how he found himself on this career track, as well as gathered advice that he could provide to aspiring SAP professionals. Akshay, welcome aboard to the podcast.

Akshay Patel: Thank you. Thank you, David.

David Chaviano: At the start of every episode, we always want to get our hero's origin story. Tell us a little bit about yourself. Where are you from? Where'd you grow up? Educational background and how you found yourself on this track towards becoming an SAP or actually being an SAP consultant.

Akshay Patel: Yeah, sure. Thank you. First of all, thank you for inviting me here for the podcast. Myself, Akshay Patel, and I'm currently working as a junior consultant at Syntex Canada. And for my background, like my background actually has nothing to do with the SAP. I studied electrical engineering back home in Gujarat, India, where I grew up. And then in 2018, I moved to Canada for higher studies and completed my electromechanical engineering technician diploma from Fensho College in London, Ontario. And when I was studying I worked part-time in a manufacturing company that made a dashboard for the car and after graduating I was like working full-time at the same company as a maintenance technician over the periods and was maintaining the equipment and the machines on the shop floor then I also worked for the Starbucks as the maintenance technician and I was just maintaining all the coffee machines throughout the Ontario region and then later on I joined like one of the laser manufacturing company which also makes the like a robotics machine and the automation machines and I was like mainly responsible to maintain those machines and like troubleshooting the issues and all where first I like came to know about the SAP and I heard the SAP word in I would say like in 2022 for the first time when I was just giving the quotes to the customers and And I was just checking the parts of ability on the SAP.

Then like one day, my cousin, who has been in the SAP field for more than 17 years and she is living in the US, she visited me and explained like how SAP basically runs the entire business behind the scenes. That really caught my attention and I started watching YouTube videos, learning about the modules and taking SAP course at one private college in the Toronto. Since I had experience in the purchasing and maintenance throughout my previous job roles, the sourcing and procurement area just made a lot of sense to me. So I selected that module and even like dove deep into that module and training. Then eventually, I applied for a junior consultant positions at Syntex. And I'm really grateful that it gave me that first break. Within my first month and a half, I also kept certifications.

David Chaviano: You found your way into SAP consulting just, it sounds like by chance, through a family member that mentioned it to you. But before you studied electrical engineering back home in India. So what was the, I guess, the reason you went in that direction, electrical engineering? Was it strictly sort of pragmatic career focus or um something else.

Akshay Patel: Yeah like uh electrical it was like career focused but then i was working in the like a field job but then like uh after i met with my cousin and then as he told me like how sap works and all then i like started looking at the sap field like first i was just maintaining the shop floor but then uh like i came to know how digitally we can actually maintain the soft floor even not working on the soft floor so that's So I was very keen to know more in SAP, and that's how my career has changed.

David Chaviano: Okay. So just to clarify, after you graduated, you immediately went into the field of electrical engineering, or at least something related to what you worked on. Can you repeat? It was Starbucks you were working with?

Akshay Patel: Yeah, it was like three, four different companies, but one of them was Starbucks as a maintenance technician.

David Chaviano: Okay, got it. And then you realized that those companies were using SAP and you wanted to get a little more familiarized with sort of like the digital side of things and how it was running. Okay. So like in terms of advantages or disadvantages that you probably had, so you had sort of the technical orientation, you understood the industry a little bit already. You understood what the customers were doing on the ground. And then that's sort of how you turned into like wanting to understand the digital side of it and how it was working. Okay, so that makes sense. So you had sort of the prerequisite knowledge, you had sort of systems thinking that came from electrical engineering already, which I think was well suited, probably for understanding SAP a bit better.

Maybe you can go a little bit into the actual materials, like your step one. So you said you started googling things and checking out YouTube videos that explained SAP. And then from there, where'd you go?

Akshay Patel: Yeah, after I like watching out the videos on YouTube and all, even I watched the full series of the SAP Sourcing and Procurement Series. And then I joined one private college in Toronto to get the training.

David Chaviano: Okay.

Akshay Patel: So I finished my training, but it was on on-premise software.

David Chaviano: Yeah.

Akshay Patel: And then when I got a job, it was in public cloud.

David Chaviano: Okay. Got it. And could you talk about a little bit of the job hunt? So you decided you wanted to get to know SAP a bit better. You started doing your own research. You started doing training in that direction. What was the job hunt like? So and at what point in your life did this start?

Akshay Patel: Yeah. So like even while I was doing my training at the college, like I started preparing the resume and I was like applied for tons of job every day. But like I rarely heard back from the employers because like mostly most companies are looking for the experienced consultant who will have some project experience. But then I came to know about the junior hiring at Syntax and then I applied. Actually, I got the link from LinkedIn and then I applied on that. And then I was invited at the Syntax Canada headquarters just to give the interviews. There was even like 16 applicants, but there was like series of rounds and that's how the process went.

David Chaviano: Okay, so you got an invite from LinkedIn and from who? From a recruiter on behalf of Syntax?

Akshay Patel: Actually, yeah, Syntax has like posted a junior consultant job fair on the LinkedIn. And then I applied through that link on the LinkedIn.

David Chaviano: Okay. So you found them just based on your research looking for SAP related work.

Akshay Patel: Yeah. I was just like looking for any junior or trainee roles for the SAP consultant and where I found the Syntax Canada story. Okay.

David Chaviano: Got it. Makes sense. And just like you said, you applied to a whole bunch of jobs for that. I'm assuming most of these were SAP related as well?

Akshay Patel: Yes, yes, yes. It was an SAP consultant.

David Chaviano: Okay, got it. And then...

Akshay Patel: Even some end users jobs as well. I applied for the end users roles as well.

David Chaviano: Okay, makes sense.

Akshay Patel: But they were mostly looking for the experienced consultant or the experienced person.

David Chaviano: Okay. And what sort of things, like when you... You wanted to set up your LinkedIn page and your resume in a way that was conducive to getting a job interview. So what were some of the things that you put on there? Did you have certifications already or was it too early for that? What were the things that you think were on your application that got you that interview?

Akshay Patel: Yeah, certification was too early for me because even I didn't know how the SAP works and I don't have any access to the SIDs or UIDs or Learning Hub to just go through the

reading material and give the exam. So, like, during my training, I just got the access to SAP on-premise software where I was just, like, configuring the system and doing the daily tasks. So, like, for the resume, I just, like, took help from the professor, like, from whom I was getting the training. And also my cousin sister, like, I was just going back and forth. Like, I was sending my resume to the professor once they, like, modified to fine-tuning. Then I just forward that resume to my cousin and then see like suggest some corrections to make. And that's how I like build up my resume. But it was like mainly my previous job experience was in there just to show them like I've worked in the manufacturing environment. I worked as a maintenance technician where I had exposed to the materials movement and like how to procure the materials and all like checking the abilities, providing the quotes, something like that.

David Chaviano: Okay. Got it. So, all right. That makes sense. So you had already some previous experience in sort of like the practical things that the module of SAP is already touching, which I think is great. People with on the ground experience already.

All right. And so then what was the interview process like? So you had 16 other candidates. Were you made aware that there were 16 other people who were applying for this spot or how did that work?

Akshay Patel: Yeah. So like at the first round, it was like on the LinkedIn, they shared a post that anyone who have like interest in learning SAP or have some end user experience or at least have knowledge about the SAP, they can apply on the link. And there were like, I would say around 180 to 190 people who applied for the job. So like for the first round, they held one Zoom meeting kind of thing where we all joined in one link, like in one room. And they like break apart like 10 individuals into a room and they separated like 16 rooms in total i guess there was like 10 or 20 people in each room so i was like they break apart into like 16 different rooms and i was in one of them and then they selected like one candidate from each room so i was like getting selected from that room so like a total 16 were there and then they told us that okay you are 16 are finalized now and then we will proceed with the next round of the interview okay and then yeah then they invited us to the syntax canada office in canada in toronto and then now where they just took like a couple of interviews and then they selected like four out of 16 okay.

David Chaviano: All right got it um and during that process were you like sat in front of an sap system and they said hey do this task let's see if you can do it or was it more um just understanding your personality, soft skills, ability to work in the team, et cetera, that sort of stuff.

Akshay Patel: Yeah, it was mainly just to understand the personality and like what interest makes you to come here for an interview, like what the SAP knowledge you have, or you can say something, whatever you know about the SAP. And it was some situational based questions as well. Like if you have this situation, what you would suggest to a client or what you would do as a consultant and all.

David Chaviano: Okay, got it. And you made it through that process and you got the news that you're hired. When you get that news that you're hired, do they let you know? Or was it clear from the beginning what module you're going to be working on? Or was it just sort of open until the point of getting hired? And then they said, okay, you're going to be, what was it, procurement or material management?

Akshay Patel: Yes, yes. Sourcing and procurement in public cloud, but like materials management in older words, like in on premise kind of thing. Yeah. So, yeah, like at the time of interview, they just ask us like in which module you are interested. And like we all give our interested modules and like I told them that I have done a practice in the sourcing and procurement. And I have also like past experience, which is like aligning towards this module. So I'm interested to learn more in this and they said yeah they are okay with it too okay so that's how it started nice.

David Chaviano: Okay so you started with your um I guess on your own technical training which is all on-prem based and then you start onboarding how much of that stuff that you learned before the on-prem stuff is applicable to once you start learning on on public cloud would you say that you're still onboarding a lot faster than somebody who's starting from scratch.

Akshay Patel: Yeah I think I would say that but like during my training i learned like most of the sourcing and procurement basic things like how we can set up the master data how we can set up the supplier master data material master data how someone can create the purchase order which is the main fundamental thing for sourcing and procurement to procure the materials so how we can like do a good receipt after receiving the materials and how the warehouse clerk can move the goods within the warehouse and how we can just create the supplier invoice so like it's an end-to-end procure to pay process so yeah i i came to know all the basic things about how the process works but when i get into it like when i actually started my job then i came to know like what the actual process is because it's like more deeper than what i have learned in the beginning okay.

David Chaviano: All right makes sense and i guess that is to be expected that this stuff takes a long time to master and get a hang of so now that you're on the job. You've started, you said, since last year, right?

Akshay Patel: Yes, last year in September. Like last week of August, so in September.

David Chaviano: Okay. So you're just over a year on the job then. What is the day-to-day business like? How many projects have you been assigned to? So what's the nature of the work on the day-to-day?

Akshay Patel: So yeah in the beginning like after I started like after I was onboarded there was some free time to just get to use to the system like how it's working and like I was provided access to the learning hub where I can go and check all the courses available for sourcing and procurement I can learn and I can apply for the examination for the certification then I got certification within one and a half like two certification I earned one is for particularly sourcing and procurement and the other one was for the public cloud fundamentals like how public clouds actually works so yeah it was again a great experience and then after i got my certification then there was like one project project is going to start in the mid-november last year so like my manager and my mentor gave me opportunity to shadow the one sourcing and procurement consultant where i can learn everything behind the scenes. So I was not a direct contact with the client, but I was just working with the sourcing and procurement consultant.

So whatever questions I had during the process, then I can ask to my senior consultant. And I was part of all the fit to standard activities and all the configuration activities. So I just get more idea and touch base on each and every point in detail. So it was a great learning experience at the first. And then in March this year, I was assigned to a different project. There was like a mainly a distribution warehouse company.

So on previous project, like I was supporting, I was just shadowing one senior consultant. Then the senior consultant like supported me during my second project. So I got help from him and where I come to know like more like new things and how we can interact with the client direct. And I was a direct point of contact during that project. So I was like leading the fit to standard workshops. I was just recording the requirements on calm. I was just asking client to write the user stories. And even that project is still going on and we are on the realization phase it is this end of the realization phase so like throughout the project is was a nice learning experience and it was a nice project to work on and i also like after april i also got assigned to a different project which is on like we just finished the explore phase on that project so which is just entering to the realization phase so all right yeah uh till now i have been working to like three different projects.

David Chaviano: Nice.

Akshay Patel: It's a great learning experience.

David Chaviano: Okay, so you're well underway to becoming a senior professional in the SAP field, specifically the sourcing and procurement, at least.

Akshay Patel: Yeah, not really. Like for now, like it's every day, it's a new learning journey, new learning curve. I'm still like learning new things. And even like on each project, you learn something new. So it's like an ongoing learning journey.

David Chaviano: And on the topic of growth, improvement, learning, et cetera, what does the progression track look like? So your title is, I assume, junior consultant now since you started out. So how does that continue over the years in terms of career progression?

Akshay Patel: Yeah. So right now, like I'm working at the junior consultant stage, but the next step for me is to like, I'm planning to become a full stage consultant and I want to remove that junior thing before the consultant. So yeah, I want to be like a full-time consultant, someone who can handle the configuration and workshop independently and like i'm thinking that with my two certification in the public cloud i already like feel much more confident than like i started last year so now i'm like understanding both the technical and the business side of project and from i want to like move towards the senior consultant role after after i get used to the consultant role so where i can design like full-end to an SAP solutions and help guide other new consultants who start like me as a junior. So I can be like helpful to them as well.

David Chaviano: Okay, that sounds good. So you're well on your way. And I think, at least from the beginner's perspective, I would say that the hardest part is probably getting your foot in the door, getting that interview, getting started.

And I want to ask maybe a potentially controversial question from that perspective around AI, agentic AI specifically. Do you have any concerns about being replaced by artificial intelligence? Or maybe word on the street is some companies are looking at these junior roles and where you actually are developing and learning so much. Rumor has it that a lot of potentially some C-suites might be thinking, hey, those junior roles could be taken over by an AI agent. Do you have any personal concerns about that, like that pipeline being turned off behind you? It sounds like you got in just in time a year ago before this whole discussion started. Do you have any thoughts on that in one way or the other? Especially when, like, assuming you're speaking with somebody who's one

year behind you or who will be entering in the next few months the job market. What are your thoughts on that? If you feel like commenting.

Akshay Patel: Yeah even like we are hearing so many new things that uh ai is coming in into the market and like taking everyone's job but the role i'm working at like at the consultant level i actually see ai is more support tool than the threat because in sap i can like automate the repetitive work but the humans are like understanding the business requirement communicating with the client and the problem solving also the configuration part that still needs to be done by the real consultant i would say like ai is not much more capable in handling those things as of now for sure but i think ai will make consultant more efficient and not replacing them.

David Chaviano: So some comforting words in that direction. And maybe to close this out, in terms of final words of advice to our listeners out there, our folks who are either just entering the workplace, maybe a few months behind you, or still in university, do you have any words of advice for them? Or maybe even career changers out there? Like, I guess, technically, you would be a career changer, you started in a different field and moved to SAP. So some words of advice that you would have for those folks looking to do what you did?

Akshay Patel: Yeah, so like once I came to know about the SAP then I started learning the SAP so I would say like yeah like anyone who wants to switch the career to SAP then maybe we can start like if someone is starting from the scratch then maybe we can just touch base the basic things like how first understand the fundamental how SAP actually works from the start. And also like it's every day new learning and at the beginning everyone was saying that like why are you switching the career it is like a more money-minded or it is something a technical thing you would like to learn so I would say like it was both the thing for me but not the money mining at the beginning but it was like something like I want to learn some technical things because I was working on the software but then I like came to know the process that digitally work, like how we can manage the soft floor actually by not working on the soft floor. So that thing changed my mind to go and work like how the system works behind the scenes. And I started in that way. I don't know, like it is the right answer or no, but...

David Chaviano: Well, yeah, there's no right or wrong answer, but it sounds like that might be a good angle to have because a lot of people have trouble with job openings that require prior experience. So I think maybe doing what you did, working in an industry or with a customer that already is using SAP, understanding what's happening on the ground, understanding the processes, and then from there working your way into the consulting role. That just might be the formula to get your foot in the door.

Akshay Patel: Yeah, it was really like hard to get a job, especially when you are a junior or like starting a new career in SAP. But as you go, then maybe you can like start. Keep learning. Don't like get disappointed when you are not landing a job or landing an interview. But instead, like you can keep learning new formulas, new configuration every day. And it will definitely helps one day, I would say. And I'm really thankful to the syntax that gave me the opportunity to start a job as a junior consultant. Because even like if you don't get a chance to start the career in SAP, then there is no way that you can only learn the theoretical parts without any practical experience. But like when you when you have practical experience as well, then, yeah, like one day you will definitely get success.

David Chaviano: Okay, sounds great. And maybe a shameless plug out there for you students that might be listening. Just Google SAP Learning Hub Student Edition. We're now providing free certification and practice systems to students out there. So check that out if you're interested. Thanks a lot, Akshay.

Akshay Patel: For sure.

David Chaviano: Appreciate you sharing your time with us and your experiences. And I hope it helps at least a few potential SAP starters out there in their career growth and development. Thanks a lot.

Akshay Patel: Thank you. Thank you. Thank you, David.

David Chaviano: Thanks for listening, everybody. Until next time, goodbye.

Akshay Patel: Thanks, everyone.