



EXPERT INSIGHT: SAP UPGRADE FACTORY

ADOPTING A MANUFACTURING APPROACH TO UPGRADES DELIVERS THEM FASTER, AT LOWER RISK AND WITH PREDICTABLE COSTS

Susanne Erbel has worked at SAP since 2001, and been involved in many SAP Consulting projects. Since 2006 she has been totally responsible for all aspects of the SAP Upgrade Factory strategic program, including its design, set up and the running of projects, of which there were 295 in 2007.

In this article Susanne gives unique insights into how the SAP Upgrade Factory came about, the objectives behind it and how it is structured.

When carrying out customer research in 2006, the SAP Consulting organization discovered that over 90% of customers who were using the SAP R/3 application were still running old versions of the software. In Germany alone this amounted to around 9,000 productive system landscapes.

It was a worrying statistic, for two reasons. Firstly, to maintain continuity of support, all these customers would have to upgrade in the following four years. With many customers naturally choosing SAP Consulting to help them, it could put a considerable strain on its resources.

The second reason was, if anything, even more concerning, as Susanne Erbel, Consulting Program Manager, SAP, explains. "When we asked customers why they were putting off upgrading, they gave us the same answer time and time again. They were nervous about the costs and risks involved. The effort of upgrading was actually a barrier to taking advantage of the new features and functionality we were building into the software."

Standardized, repeatable processes

At the time, each upgrade was treated as an individual project, but SAP Consulting realized that a new approach was needed. "Customers were telling us that what they wanted was a faster, known cost upgrade path," says Susanne Erbel. "They also wanted assurances that users would see no difference in how their SAP ERP solution worked after the upgrade."

To develop a solution SAP Consulting brought together its most experienced upgrade consultants. They quickly realized that there were many similarities in the approach they took to the upgrade projects they were involved in. This was particularly true of the technical upgrade – implementing the new technology while maintaining the same capabilities for users.

With this in mind, a small group of upgrade experts worked on developing standardized, repeatable processes, tools and methodologies that could be used for every technical upgrade. At the same time, SAP Consulting realized that, by sharing the workload with the Global Delivery group of SAP Consulting, it could both reduce costs and deliver the capability to ramp resources up and down depending on customer demand. The SAP Upgrade Factory was born.

Best of both worlds

Combining local resources with the Global Delivery group of SAP Consulting gives the SAP Upgrade Factory great flexibility. "Customers gain the best of both worlds," says Susanne Erbel. "Our experienced onsite upgrade coach provides the focal point for planning, project definition and management and communication, enabling close collaboration with the customer at every stage. On the other hand, the Global Delivery group of SAP Consulting enables us to execute the upgrade quickly and cost effectively, to extremely high quality standards. Out of all the projects the SAP Upgrade Factory has undertaken, none of them have taken longer than six months, even with up to 12,000 modifications required."

Innovative tools and methodologies

As part of the process of setting up the Upgrade Factory, SAP Consulting experts also developed new tools and methodologies that not only accelerate the upgrade process but deliver consistent predictable results.

"The first service provided by the SAP Upgrade Factory is the fixed price technical upgrade planning service (SAP Quick Upgrade Evaluation)," says Susanne Erbel.

“For this we developed comprehensive tools that enable us to clearly define and scope the technical work that will be required, including the services and resources that will be needed. Consequently, we can provide a fixed price quote for the second service, the technical upgrade implementation service.”

For the technical upgrade implementation, SAP Consulting worked closely with the Global Delivery group of SAP Consulting to develop detailed checklists, planning timetables and quality processes, as well as a clear definition of the roles of all those involved in the project, both onsite and offshore. Based on lessons learned by experienced upgrade consultants and best practices, these ensure a systematic, repeatable approach to how the implementation is executed.

“We decided to offer two services because it gives our customers greater flexibility,” says Susanne Erbel. “If they would like to execute the technical upgrade themselves, they can just use the planning service to help them with their preparations. Alternatively, by taking advantage of both services, customers can have the entire upgrade performed for them.”

Minimizing downtime

In addition, tools have been developed to minimize downtime. “As our customers’ businesses are totally reliant on their SAP ERP solution, downtime while the upgrade is being implemented is always a key consideration. The tools we have developed enable the cut over to the latest version to be kept to a minimum.”

Kraft Foods is a good example. Meticulous planning and a full dress rehearsal enabled the cut over of 11,000 users to be achieved in 21 hours, well under the time that had been allotted. “The key to the success of this project was the team spirit and positive working environment,” said Jan Ziskasen, Director SAP Competency Centre, Kraft Foods. “Communication between the Kraft Foods and SAP teams was excellent and each and every team member worked hard to safeguard the success of the project.”

Extending capabilities

Today the SAP Upgrade Factory has successfully completed over 300 SAP ERP upgrade projects for customers like Kraft Foods and Panasonic, and the ‘factory’ approach has been extended to other areas. “The principles behind the SAP Upgrade Factory have proved so powerful that we have extended them and developed services for upgrading the SAP NetWeaver Business Intelligence component, the SAP Supply Chain Management application and Unicode,” says Susanne Erbel. “In addition, our latest innovation is the SAP Mapping Factory, which uses a similar approach to the upgrade factory to help our customers create a single, central enterprise application integration platform using the SAP NetWeaver Process Integration offering.”

For more information about the SAP Upgrade Factory please e-mail upgradefactory@sap.com or visit www.sap.com/upgradefactory

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