

SAP and Information Mapping®

Background

There are applications for Information Mapping related to SAP implementation and maintenance. This document describes them.

What is SAP?

SAP is a large corporate software package that has multiple business functions for business reengineering. SAP's solution comprises a suite of four major applications

- accounting
- manufacturing
- sales, and
- human resources

distributed among more than 70 modules. Each application can be implemented separately and even partially, but R/3 is designed to control all major business processes in real time, via a single software architecture, on a client/server computing platform. This totally integrated system helps automate or eliminate costly, error-prone manual communications procedures.

The fit

Organizations often choose to fit SAP into their business rather than fit their business into the SAP software product. When fitting SAP into your business you need to write interfacing software code to transfer corporate data

- to SAP from existing corporate applications
- from SAP to existing corporate applications.

Example: You decide to keep your time reporting software system, but have it fed the data to SAP for analysis and reporting.

Organizations that choose to fit their business to conform to SAP's strict integration requirements need to

- re-design business processes
- develop new procedures
- train employees in the new procedures

without missing a step in running their business.

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SAP and Information Mapping®, Continued

Continual maintenance

SAP frequently improves their software. When sufficient improvement has been made they bundle it all together and issue it to their clients as a new release. Clients are invoiced for each new release. If you miss one release, you usually can't proceed with the following release.

New releases don't often mesh with the interfaces you wrote because SAP often modifies some key hooks that you were using to support your interface applications which means that

- interfaces that were sending SAP data successfully may no longer perform this function properly
- applications that were receiving SAP data successfully may no longer perform this function properly.

This continual problem requires continual maintenance from either an SAP consultant, or an internal employee that you have trained over a 6-12 month period. You can bet they will soon be leaving for better pay because of the corporate raiding and the severe shortage of SAP consultants that know their stuff.

Critical success factor

If an organization has an interface breakdown and key data is not flowing freely from SAP to their corporate systems and vice-versa, they have a problem. Perhaps a severe enough problem to impact the organization dramatically.

Excellent documentation on all written interfaces is a critical success factor that can limit the business impact of failure and reduce repair time significantly because it will show exactly

- how the interface software is written
 - how the interface software hooks into the SAP software product
 - what the transferred data and reporting looked like prior to the breakdown.
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SAP and Information Mapping®, Continued

Critical success factor (continued)

With an existing map to follow

- the guess work is eliminated
 - consulting time is reduced (by not requiring the consultant to get fully acclimated to the business before helping solve the problem)
 - less knowledgeable staff are able to fix problems in unfamiliar territory
 - the business does not have to live-and-die by the existence of a resident SAP guru
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Unnecessary pain

SAP is going to be everywhere. Everyone who is buying it suffers from “terminal uniqueness” and is writing interface code. They will suffer a lot of unnecessary pain unless they adopt a writing methodology that is quick to use and extremely readable. If they stick to old habits of not documenting anything, they’ll pay for it with ongoing, large consulting bills.

Anti-paper

IT people are anti-paper and are always pressed for time. They would really like documentation written in HTML format so they could pull it up in their browser, do a search, and get to where they want to go quickly.

This is very easy to do using MS Office '97 - Word 7.0 since

- all table of contents entries would be linked to the appropriate map
 - all see page's would be linked to the appropriate map
 - they need only
 - point, click, arrive , scan, read only what necessary, perform the maintenance to get the application fixed
 - adjust the documentation as required and move on.
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