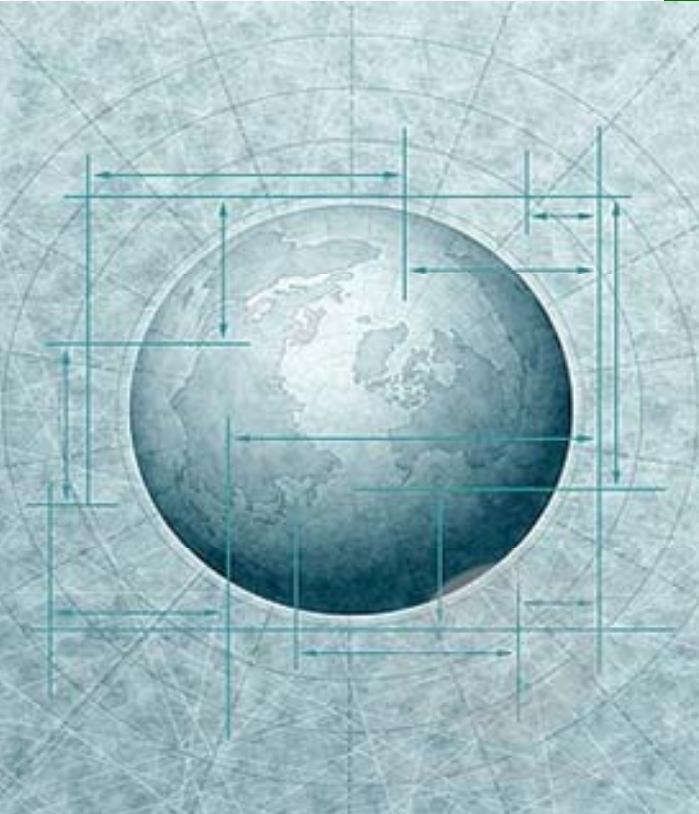


Basis is Eternal

(and Can Be Done from Anywhere)

Michael
Doane



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THROUGHOUT THE LIFE-CYCLE of SAP business applications, Basis support is a necessity. Not everyone is fully aware of what Basis is or what Basis people do, so:

Definition of Basis (from searchSAP.com): Basis is a set of middleware programs and tools ...provides the underlying base (thus the name) that enables applications (such as FI, CO, and SD, for example) to be interoperable and portable across operating systems and database products.

What Basis people do on a regular, um, basis:

- Daily monitoring of system performance
- Data base administration
- Operating Administration

What Basis people do as needed:

- Upgrades
- User administration
- Support packages
- Hardware migrations

Basis support is not necessarily an integral part of the Center of Excellence because it does not directly address business process fulfillment and evolution. However, without solid Basis support, you may well experience unnecessarily long response times, database anomalies, and overly-complex upgrades, all of which will degrade business process fulfillment as well as the nervous systems of most end users.

Basis work is techie stuff so of course we often hear the terms 'Basis Geek', 'Basis Wonk', 'Techno-Weenie', or worse. As it happens, the relative value of a Basis specialist can vary and that variation is often a matter of whether or not an individual is keeping up with the technology.

I am reminded of an internal debate some years ago at META Group in regard to the offshore outsourcing of programming jobs. While one side of the debate argued that America was losing its technical talent, my colleague Stan Lepeak piped up with: “Are we talking about highly talented software engineers or merely hung-over Java jockeys spending half the day playing video games before going off at five P.M. to get liquored up at the VFW?”

The softer point to be made here is that it is unwise to simply grab a “Basis Geek” or two and consider the matter settled. The variation of needs must be matched by a variation of skills, some of which may be required in-house on a full-time basis and others which may best be outsourced.

Delivery from Anywhere

Vendor distance matters when you’re ordering a pizza. It matters much less for Basis support. As in, not at all.

During implementation, project managers love to have a Basis person at hand even when that person is not fully occupied because when they are needed that need is urgent. This urgency is noted by clients who tend to ask how many Basis people they will need on-site after Go-Live. My classic consultant response in years past was “it depends” but in recent years my response has been “very likely zero”.

After Go-Live there is less urgency relative to daily Basis administration. Outside of organizations with more than \$1B in annual revenues or with very large user populations, few firms really need full-time in-house Basis staff unless they are continually in roll-out mode, or are continually tinkering with software add-ons, or did a very poor job of implementing. I regularly receive requests from clients for “a temporary Basis guy” and the scope of requirements for such requests is a smorgasbord of upgrade assistance, enhancement pack, support for a business intelligence project, and, oh yes, we’d also like some ABAP programming support. In past years, my response was to place a Basis consultant or two for a limited time-frame but inevitably the client was back asking for something more and usually something different which often necessitated sending someone new.

A colleague of mine once claimed “I’m grout” meaning that he was being asked to fill in all the client cracks. Bringing in consultants to serve as “grout” is a normal response except that the consultants do not necessarily need to be on-site.

While a local Basis handyman is, well, *handy*, it may be wiser to outsource most of the following functions, all of which can be done remotely:

Daily Monitoring

- Abnormal system activity
- Poor system performance
- Load distribution across SAP Servers
- Verification of successful backups
- Output Management
- Record Locking administration
- Failed update review
- Notify users of failed jobs

All Database Administration (Oracle, SQL Server, DB2, etc.):

- Perform daily monitoring of Database health
- Checking Database logs for abnormal conditions
- Monitoring and projecting Database growth
- Performance and tuning analysis for modifications to the Database structure

Operating system administration:

- Monitoring of operating system errors
- Application of OS patches
- OS tuning and proactive maintenance as required by SAP

Wade Walla is the founder of Group:Basis and has provided remote Basis services for a number of years. When I asked him what is the most frequent comment he gets from clients, he replied, "Relief. They are relieved that they no longer have to carry a beeper around twenty-four hours a day and that they are freed up to do fewer tasks better rather than a multitude of tasks at less than optimum levels."

There is another advantage to outsourcing Basis support, which is to move your organization out of its own technical echo-chamber. As Wade puts it, "If you remain fully internal with one SAP experience and one hardware partner, you will clearly be missing out on the continuous wave of new knowledge, new best practices, and the like."

As an example, when you install SAP, it defaults to a particular format in the installer. If you install the development, QAS and production instances identically (which lesser experienced Basis folks will do), you have missed out on a free and easy disaster recover strategy.

To get out of the Not Invented Here (or, We Do It All Ourselves) you can engage a company that specializes all the time in all aspects of Basis across an array of clients. An advantage in regard to Basis specialists when compared to applications consultants is that Basis work does not require specific business or industry context. Clearly, an incoming applications consultant needs a ramp-up period in order to understand a client's business context. Such a ramp-up is much briefer for a Basis specialist.

Further, many companies have operational environments that are fairly stable. That is the point of buying SAP. Why should firms in this state have to pay full-time salaries to support what is designed to be stable? In other words, why not treat the exceptions as they occur rather than hiring three or four Maytag repairmen?

Another aspect in favor of remote Basis support services is that the Basis workload is much more predictable than is the applications support workload. While help desk support has unpredictable spikes and lags, the Basis workload is a series of lag lag lag with very periodic and predictable spikes. Support packages come around about every three months. You may upgrade every three to four years (and would probably have a need for outside help for this anyway).

But what about the Monday after you've installed a support package? Is Solitaire on tap for your in-house Basis guy? What's happening at the VFW?

Even if you don't go down the line with continuous Basis remote support, you will necessarily need an at-hand life-line for key demand spikes, loss of your in-house resource to illness, retirement or transfer, or if your firm suffers a physical disaster.

While quality and efficacy of enterprise applications consulting and systems integration are incrementally improving, Basis and other SAP technical expertise is growing exponentially. This is most especially evident in the consulting/support environment where Basis specialists are required to keep up their skills to maintain a competitive edge.

In a stable environment, motivating in-house Basis support staff is a challenge. A Basis specialist was once overhead to mutter “maintenance blows”. That phrase just about sums up a chronic difficulty clients have in retaining in-house Basis administrators.

The Cost of Remote Basis Support

Mark Dendinger finds that many clients in small and medium-sized firms (i.e. <\$750M in revenues) either do not know that such services are available or are surprised by how economically viable they can be. “Most clients jump at this offering once they understand the affordability and flexibility.”

In a stable SAP environment, Basis work is extremely routine and retaining Basis help is not always easy or even economical. Remote Basis support for the tasks previously listed will cost from \$20 to \$30 per month per user. Thus if you have 500 users, your monthly cost will be between \$10,000 and \$15,000. Other cost variables will include the make-up of your applications portfolio (perhaps including non-SAP applications), the version being maintained, and the nature of the user population (e.g. are there a high number of mobile users?).

Upgrades

To do is to be. Aristotle.

To be is to do. Sartre.

Do be do be do be do. Sinatra.

The question of whether or not to upgrade, or when to upgrade, and how to upgrade is a matter of constant consternation to SAP managers.

In essence, there are three types of SAP upgrade:

Technical: in which the focus is to maintain current functionality.

Functional: in which system complexity may be reduced and operations streamlined

Strategic: in which new and optimized business scenarios are installed as well as a higher version of SAP software.

The most common upgrade is technical/functional.

Many upgrade projects founder due to the classic problem of poor and/or optimistic planning, which often includes using only in-house staff that may have never accomplished an upgrade.

Wade Walla’s firm offers fixed fee upgrade services that always begin with a brief but essential upgrade questionnaire that addresses both the current and planned environments. The follow-up to this is an in-depth analysis that addresses key technical aspects but also:

- Is the proposed upgrade steep (e.g. from version 4.2 to ECC 6.0)?
- Is SAP heavily customized and what re-work may be required to upgrade the customizations?
- Is the upgrade accompanied by either the addition of extended applications or a migration/roll-out to other sites?
- Are SAP systems heavily interfaced to other internal business applications?
- Are SAP systems heavily interfaced to external (client/supplier/bank) applications?

The level to which consulting is required is also largely dependent upon a client's internal SAP expertise as well as their past experience. A firm that has already undergone two or more prior upgrades will be better positioned than a firm that has never upgraded.

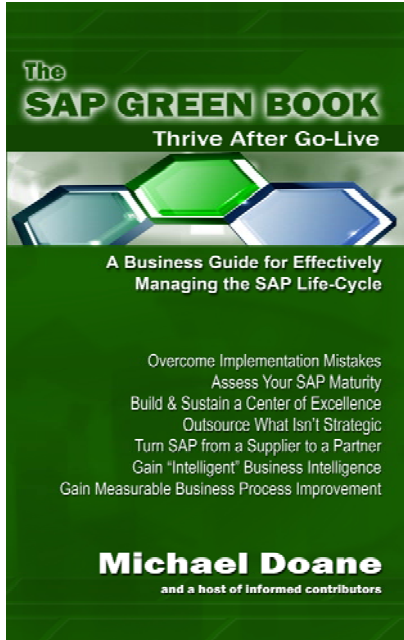
One often neglected aspect of SAP upgrades is the re-training of end users. I have long observed that the majority of firms tend to spring upgrades on their end user population and provide little or no training. The result is that end users fail to take advantage of new or extended functionality and in many cases, out of fear, will use less of the applications functions than before the upgrade. It is recommended that firms undergoing functional or strategic applications seek outside help to address end user refresher training.

This white paper is excerpted from the recently released **SAP Green Book, Thrive After Go-Live**.

By the author of [The New SAP Blue Book, A Concise Business Guide to the World of SAP](#)

THE SAP GREEN BOOK

Thrive After Go-Live



“Michael Doane knows more about what happens when SAP gets implemented than anyone outside of SAP, and many inside. Follow his advice and thrive.”

Joshua Greenbaum, Enterprise Applications Consulting

“The New SAP Blue Book is already a classic and I expect the SAP Green Book to join its ranks as a dog-eared mainstay of SAP project and support teams. Mr. Doane has a knack for breaking the complexities of SAP into simple, elemental models for gaining business benefit. These books comprise your go-to guide for SAP success.”

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Since its initial publication in 1998 and through seven revisions since then, The New SAP Blue Book, A Concise Business Guide to the World of SAP has been the go-to book for anyone with a stake in SAP success.

With The SAP Green Book, Thrive After Go-Live, author Michael Doane concentrates on what clients should do AFTER implementing SAP enterprise software. The book addresses the imperative of business and IT alignment intended to result in measurable business benefit in a sustainable organization.

216 pages, 60 graphs, charts, and tables ISBN 978-1-57579-415-0

These books are not available in bookstores. They are available through www.assuranet.net (also available at Amazon in September with no discounting)

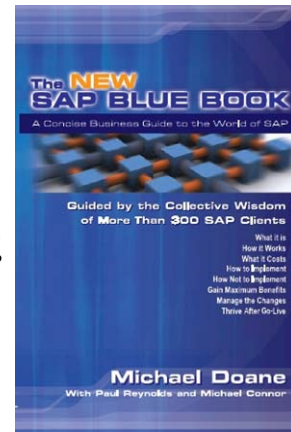
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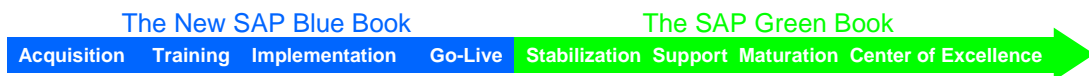
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For more information about Basis and SAP middleware services, contact Mark Dendinger at mark.dendinger@assuranet.net or 601-720-4999

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