

### When and How to Consider a Solution Design Review

William Newman, *Managing Principal – Newport Consulting Group*

I'm fond of telling my clients that SAP is a vast, strategic technology platform whereby many business scenarios can be described in a variety of ways. This is important for SAP as it allows a certain "creative freedom" of the software to address unlimited business needs in the global marketplace.

There comes a time, however, where it is important for an organization to define the best way to articulate its business inside the SAP environment. This allows for an increase in maintainability once the system is implemented, reduction in overall total cost of ownership (TCO), and simplification of the architectural design.

One way to accomplish this is through a Solution Design Review (SDR) which SAP offers as a part of its Safeguarding® product offering. Safeguarding® was introduced in 2004 as a way for SAP to understand more clearly how their customers were using the software platform and to provide feedback to the customer. The net benefit to the customer, particularly in situations where the project is either internally realized or internally managed using contractor resources, is access to very senior and experienced SAP professionals (typically platinum consultants with multiple implementation experiences in a particular domain) on a time-bound, fixed-price basis.

#### **Not Consulting, Not a Service**

Your SAP account executive will be the first to tell you that a SDR is not a substitute for consulting or integration services. It is part of a product offering (Safeguarding®) which can be available to purchase similar to Value Engineering®, software, or maintenance. While there may be SAP professionals front-and-center during SDR activities, similar to maintenance it is a fee-based product offering.

Generally an SDR provides three particular areas of benefit during review activities:

1. A documented "snapshot" of the design of the system, regardless of its position in the ASAP methodology timeline.
2. Business community and executive level involvement to confirm or re-confirm the business outcomes of using SAP in the execution of business operations.
3. Alignment of technical and contractor resources in the design and realization of the system environment so everyone is "in the right seat, on the right bus."

I recommend using SDR as a way to validate the business blueprint of a new system implementation or for a significant new set of capabilities to be added to an existing SAP environment. As one CIO commented to me, "given the amount of money we are about to spend on realization activities, the cost of completing an SDR is a rounding error."

It also allows SAP as a software company to have a greater awareness of what business solutions and applications its customers are creating in the marketplace. It creates a greater dialogue, in some cases where dialogue may have been strained or altogether missing between new or long-standing customer project and SAP account teams. SAP has a "vested interest" during this process, as it can provide documented comment on the risks and opportunities of a program moving forward after SDR activities are accomplished.

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### An Intensive Process - Not for Everyone

One of the characteristics of SDR that struck me was its similarity to quality assurance and risk audits. For small and mid-size businesses the use of SDR is questionable. Like quality audit processes, in some cases undertaking the commitment to the SDR process can be economically disadvantageous for a company, due to the noticeable impact to business resource availability. However for large implementations where dedicated or partly-dedicated staff are already committed to the SAP program, an SDR can be easily scheduled. It is an intensive process divided into three activity sets:

1. Pre-review. During pre-review activities, there is a kick-off workshop typically lasting a full day, scheduled roughly 30 days in advance of the actual SDR. Prior to this workshop the SAP SDR lead will outline the specific areas to be included in the review, both in terms of SAP function and customer business scenarios. During the kick-off workshop, the SAP SDR lead will review the business scenarios and functional areas, propose a basic framework for the review, and meet the relevant business and technical staff who will participate in review activities. The SAP SDR lead will also review any pre-work the program team will need to complete prior to the actual review, and a list of documentation required prior to and during the review. The lead may also conduct specific interviews with key business and technical (customer and contractor) stakeholders prior to actual review activities.
2. Review. The review can vary in length depending upon the nature of the solution considered, but in general a full week (five business days) should be allotted. There can be multiple tracks of review activities; for example, in one recent review, the customer used a facilitative approach where joint sessions of two operational solution reviews met together in the morning and evening with breakout sessions specific to each operational solution review during the day. Be prepared to review all business scenarios, including to-be processes, and specific functional expressions of those business scenarios. Be prepared to “defend your position” when asked why the solution is to be expressed in a particular way in the SAP environment, and be prepared to hear of other ways based on the relevant expertise of the SAP SDR lead on how to accomplish program objectives. At times this can become consultative between SAP and the customer, but the extent of that consultation will be limited to ideas and recommended areas to pursue that will be highlighted in post-review activities.
3. Post-review. At the conclusion of the review, the SAP SDR lead and any SAP team members will present findings from the review. These findings will provide overall comment and feedback on areas of maintainability and proficiency in the customer solution under review, with a final presentation and report. The findings will also include recommended follow-up actions in areas the SAP SDR lead believes are critical to address to effectively move forward with the SAP program, including any specific risks to be mitigated. Typically, the final report will describe these areas, as well as other areas to consider the future use of other SAP software capabilities that were not explicitly within the scope of the review.

From start to finish the SDR process can be completed within 30-60 days, so it is important to plan appropriately when to introduce and execute an SDR during the SAP program lifecycle.

### Limitations and Expectations

Even for appropriately-sized programs, an SDR has its limitations, and these limitations should be considered carefully before embarking on such a review. First, SAP will only be able to comment with conviction on the use of SAP software. If you have a heterogeneous environment with multiple applications running in multiple business operations or units, I recommend that you focus your

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expectations on how the SAP SDR team would best suggest you leverage the SAP software platform. Second, an SDR is not a panacea for correcting a bad design or restructuring a poor SAP program. While an SDR can, for example, call out the non-standard use of standard SAP capabilities, the SAP SDR lead and team will not correct those deficiencies for you – remember, it's not a substitute for consulting. In fact, the review could identify issues regarding the appropriate use of the SAP environment, so it is advantageous to conduct the review earlier than later in the ASAP methodology program lifecycle. Finally, an SDR is only as valuable as the information used during the activities. If a customer withholds information, excludes key business stakeholders, or otherwise does not leverage the process accordingly, the review will demonstrate less value. In these cases SAP SDR leads are pretty experienced and savvy, so don't be surprised if these shortcomings are actually noted in the final review presentation and report.

### To Review or Not to Review

To restate my recommendation, an SDR is not for everyone. It is time-consuming, intensive, and rigorous. But it may be the insurance policy that an organization needs to commit to a significant undertaking, both from a stakeholder buy-in and from a technical quality assurance perspective. Today, the reasons most SAP programs fail is due to non-technical reasons, so this may be a good insurance policy indeed.



William D. ("Bill") Newman, CMC, SA, MBA, is Managing Principal and Owner of Newport Consulting Group, LLC an SAP partner focused on Enterprise Performance Management (EPM) and Governance Risk and Compliance (GRC) solutions. Mr. Newman has nearly 25 years of experience in the development and management of strategy, process, and technology solutions for world-class manufacturing organizations such as Boeing, General Motors, Volkswagen, Northrop Grumman, Honeywell, and Intel. Mr. Newman holds a BS in Aerospace Engineering with a minor in Economics from the Henry Samueli School of Engineering from UCLA and a MBA from the Conrad Hilton School of Business from Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles in management and international business. He is a Certified Management Consultant (CMC) since 1995 and a trained SA 8000 advisor in the field of social accountability since 2000. Mr. Newman is a member of

the adjunct faculty for the University of Michigan - Dearborn Graduate College of Business and is a member of the McKinsey Quarterly Executive Panel. He may be reached by phone at +1 (248) 978-2000, or by email at [wnewman@newportconsgroup.com](mailto:wnewman@newportconsgroup.com), or on Twitter ([william\\_newman](https://twitter.com/william_newman)).

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