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Partnering with Practice: How Partnerships can be Developed, Shared and Managed

Don Hardaway
Saint Louis University, don.hardaway@gmail.com

Roel Harryvan
Deloitte Consulting LLP

Xu (Frank) Wang
Saint Louis University

Justing Goodson
Saint Louis University

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Don Hardaway
Saint Louis University
don.hardaway@gmail.com

Roel Harryvan
Deloitte Consulting LLP

Xu (Frank) Wang
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Justin Goodson
Saint Louis University

Abstract:

Partnerships between business schools and practice are an area of underused potential. In their recent report, the AACSB (2012) recognizes the need for a stronger connection between education and practice and stresses that schools need to articulate the impacts of their investments in scholarship on students' educational experiences and on the broader communities they serve. In this paper, we discuss our partnering experience that we undertook to integrate an enterprise resource planning (ERP) system into our curriculum. ERP systems pose a significant technical challenge due to their complexity. We discuss the importance of developing a partnership with practice and how such a partnership offers a solution to our problem of working with a complex system in our courses. We detail a partnership with a consulting company with significant experience with ERP systems and a commitment to education. We outline how a practice partner can collaborate with faculty to enhance students' educational experience. Developing good working partnerships between practice and academe, if done effectively, can provide an opportunity to bring educational value to a new height.

Keywords: ERP, Enterprise Systems, Teaching Software, Partnering with Industry, Systems Education.

1   Introduction

A partnership between academe and practice is important for a variety of reasons. Engaging with practice in "discussions about curriculum, the assurance of learning process, and other assessments of learning activities could be valuable; but that opportunity cannot materialize unless business leaders are willing to take the time to engage on a consistent basis" (AACSB International, 2006, p. 9). We need much work to help the academic and practice communities realize the mutual benefits of a "partnership between management educators and leaders of business" (AACSB International, 2006, p. 11).

In their recent report, the AACSB (2012) recognizes the need for a stronger connection between education and practice and suggest that "the ability of schools to articulate the impacts of their investments in scholarship on students' educational experiences and on the broader communities they serve is essential". The report further states that practitioners who have funds to support business school research or have an interest in collaborating with business schools may be more likely to do so if they realize the investment impacts their bottom line (AACSB International, 2012, pp. 6-7).

Partnerships between education and business add value in various ways (AACSB International, 2006, p. 4), such as:

1.   Providing work-based learning experiences and strengthening career awareness.

2.   Helping schools build success-oriented college and career cultures that empower students.

3.   Helping educators align curriculum and readiness standards with business needs.

4.   Providing funding and equipment to modernize classrooms, workspaces, and labs.

5.   Helping youth build meaningful partnerships with strong role models and mentors.

6.   Providing financial guidance and advice that lessens affordability as a barrier to college.

Considering the benefits of forging a partnership between academia and practice, we pursued a partnership with a consulting firm, Deloitte, to help address the challenge of integrating SAP into our curriculum. The partnership began as an exploratory case study that would provide a reflective experience for both our faculty and the consultants at Deloitte. This was the first partnership we had engaged in that involved several of our faculty working with Deloitte consultants on an ongoing basis.

We used this exploratory case study in the spirit of Yin (2009, p. 18) as an empirical inquiry to investigate a contemporary phenomenon in depth and in its real-life context. Using the case study method, we could pursue a partnership with Deloitte and use SAP in the classroom with only loosely defined goals while recognizing that neither our university (Saint Louis University) nor Deloitte could fully anticipate the outcomes of the collaboration.

This paper proceeds as follows. In Section 2, we discuss the background of enterprise resource planning (ERP). In Section 3, we describe how universities are engaging in the SAP Academic Alliance. In Section 4, we focus on how we approached a partnership with practice. In Section 5, we detail the university and corporate learning that resulted from a shared space between academe and practice. Finally, in Section 6, we conclude the paper.

2   Background of ERP

2.1   Complexities of Faculty Engagement with Enterprise Systems

ERP systems are the bedrock of enterprise computing for most large companies. Enterprise systems are valued due to their highly integrated design that comprise modules that support most areas of a business. ERP systems allow businesses to support needs via one system as opposed to several disparate systems. Because ERP systems are essential to many organizations, students with ERP skills and knowledge have increased employment opportunities. Fichman, Dos Santos, and Zheng (2014) argue that proper grounding in digital innovation (including ERPs) adds value to both MBA and undergraduate business students' education. Fichman et al. (2014) further establish and describe the problem as a missed opportunity for students lacking ERP skills. For students to gain a requisite grounding in technology requires faculty that are knowledgeable and skilled with the technology. Because not all faculty have adequate technical grounding and/or experience with enterprise systems, a challenge about how to incorporate learning about enterprise systems into the curriculum exists.

Although enterprise systems can add value to a curriculum, the difficulty of coping with these complex systems (Philippakis & Hardaway, 1999) discourages many faculty members from using them in classes. Enterprise systems are complex and require much time and training on the user's part to become proficient. The large training and time commitment is a significant handicap and deterrent to adopting and integrating enterprise systems into a curriculum. Another barrier is that not all faculty have adequate training and support to assist them with the complexities of using an enterprise system. Access to an enterprise system with some training is the first hurdle faculty are confronted with when considering adopting an enterprise system in a curriculum (Strong, Fedorowicz, Sager, Stewart, & Watson, 2006; Hustad & Olsen, 2013).

3   The SAP Alliance

3.1   SAP University Alliance Background

SAP's University Alliances (UA) North American program, launched in 1996, "helps…identify, train and recruit talented young technology professionals by giving SAP software, course aids and instructional materials to member institutions for professors to teach students" (Nerney, 2013). Since its first partnership with California State University Chico, the UA program has grown to support 220 U.S. universities in providing cutting-edge software and an advanced learning environment for undergraduate and graduate IT and business students.

To bring down the cost for faculty members, SAP developed University Competence Centers (UCC) to host SAP software and faculty workshops and online workspaces to facilitate the training and the sharing of curriculum materials. These initiatives, as part of SAP UA's value proposition (see Figure 1), not only help faculty integrate SAP into the business school curriculum but also promote networking, research support, and professional development opportunities (Watson, 2001; Bradford, Vijayaraman, & Chandra, 2003).
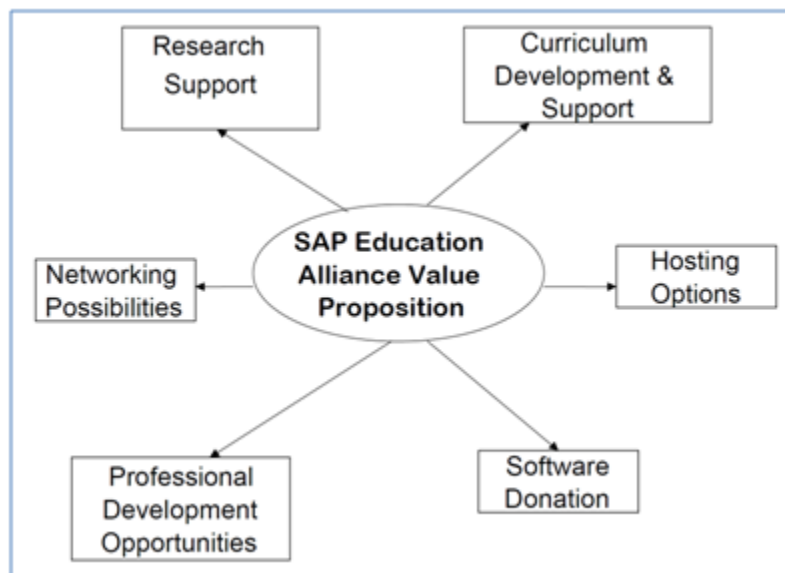

Figure 1. SAP Education Alliance Value Proposition
(Watson, 2001; Bradford et al., 2003)

In investigating university-corporate partnerships, we leveraged the benefits provided by the UA program and forged a partnership with Deloitte to successfully integrate SAP into our curriculum.

3.2   Initial Steps in Joining the SAP University Alliance Program

SAP created the UA program to address the shortage of people with skills using SAP systems. The UA program offers free SAP training and provides a forum where faculty from universities across the globe can collaborate and share knowledge about using SAP systems in the classroom. The forum provides a support structure to introduce interested faculty to SAP. In addition, workshops (offered several times a

year at different locations) and an annual conference include training on formal classroom delivery and offer practice with the full SAP system. The training provides samples of how one can use the SAP system in various courses. Once faculty complete the basic SAP training, they focus on integrating SAP into specific courses.

Although the initial SAP training provides a foundation for faculty's use of SAP, it does not provide faculty with the proficiency in SAP to diagnose and handle all issues that may arise when students use the system and make any number of mistakes, which is beyond the skill level of most faculty given their brief experience with the SAP system. In Section 4, we discuss how our partnership with Deloitte aided faculty with limited ERP expertise, helped students develop ERP skills, and benefited Deloitte in creating stronger university partnerships.

4   Developing University and Corporate Partnerships

Beyond the basic SAP UA program's training, our faculty required ongoing support to effectively integrate SAP into coursework. As we mention above, to fill this need, we pursued a partnership with Deloitte, a top consulting firm with extensive SAP experience. The partnership has been mutually beneficial in that it has led to cooperation in the classroom and pointed to potential research collaborations.

One can see the partnership's initial benefits to Deloitte in their company survey regarding volunteering work and service to communities (Deloitte, 2011). The following excerpt, taken from Deloitte's survey results, illustrates the value to Deloitte of partnering with academe.

> The eighth annual Deloitte Volunteer IMPACT Survey reveals that, compared to those who rarely or never volunteer, millennials who frequently participate in their company's employee volunteer activities are:
>
> - Twice as likely to rate their corporate culture as very positive (56 percent vs. 28 percent);
> - More likely to be very proud to work for their company (55 percent versus 36 percent);
> - More likely to feel very loyal toward their company (52 percent vs. 33 percent);
> - Nearly twice as likely to be very satisfied with the progression of their career (37 percent vs. 21 percent);
> - More likely to be very satisfied with their employer (51 percent vs. 32 percent); and,
> - More likely to recommend their company to a friend (57 percent vs. 46 percent)
>
> "Our own experience has demonstrated the positive outcomes of a strategic corporate volunteer program," said Evan Hochberg, national leader of Deloitte's community involvement initiative. "It's very exciting to have research that more broadly quantifies the connection between workplace volunteerism and several drivers of positive organizational culture among millennials."

4.1   The Unfolding of Our Partnership with Deloitte

At the beginning of our partnership, Deloitte considered community service as its primary contribution and faculty considered SAP support its primary benefit. Over time, the partnership deepened and other benefits surfaced. Prior to our partnership, Deloitte did not recruit our students. A major goal of our academic program was to equip students with the SAP skills required to attract the recruiting attention of Deloitte and other major firms.

A milestone in our partnership was Deloitte's contract with the university to commit consultant time to our SAP initiative. The contract provided for scheduled support hours as opposed to on-the-side volunteer time. As faculty ramped up SAP course content, reliable support from Deloitte was helpful, proving valuable in the development of new courses.

Beyond the technical skills needed to work with SAP, we needed to introduce the students to SAP's business value to enterprises. To address this need, we arranged for business meetings between Deloitte consultants and student teams during a simulation course focusing on business strategy. The meetings proved particularly valuable because students could experience the power and benefit of using SAP while managing a business in a highly competitive environment.

As the partnership between the university and Deloitte evolved, we began to see changes in Deloitte's recruiting practices. Realizing a major goal of our program, Deloitte began providing internships and employment opportunities to our students with SAP skills. In addition to the formal recruitment initiative, we collaborated with Deloitte on reviewing and designing the curriculum.

Our five-year partnership with Deloitte has provided each faculty with their own experiences integrating SAP into coursework. In Section 5, we detail the partnership first from the perspective of Deloitte and then from the view of the faculty participating in the partnership.

5 Sharing and Managing a University and Corporate Partnership

5.1 Deloitte's Collaboration with Saint Louis University

From Deloitte's perspective, the value proposition of the collaboration has rested with the value added to its long-standing commitment to community outreach, to building close partnerships with universities, to contributing to preparing an educated workforce, and to expand consultants' horizon and career-development opportunities. Table 1 summarizes the value and depth of Deloitte's collaboration with faculty at Saint Louis University.

Table 1. Value and Depth of Deloitte's Collaboration with Saint Louis University Faculty

Value	Depth of collaboration	Examples of shared skills and experiences
Investment to enhance partnership with university and to build an educated workforce.	Seven seasoned consultants each assigned to a faculty member to assist classes in preparing lab work and practicum exercises	Business process knowledge and system functional experience such as sales and distribution (SD), materials management (MM), and financial accounting (FI).
Community outreach beyond traditional alumni and educational programs.	Consultants receive credits for collaborating with the University and its students, which are part of their performance evaluations and career development plans.	Business process knowledge and System functional experience, change management know-how, managerial reporting, and analytical Skills.
In working with faculty and students, consultants provide solutions while handling challenges to their norms for how problems are solved.	Each team member serves as an advisor to a group of 4-5 students on cross-functional decisions related to system functionality and business-process execution.	Change management know-how, managerial reporting, and analytical skills.

Deloitte participated with SLU to help create opportunities for Deloitte's leaders and staff members to be actively involved in their communities. Deloitte also helped to educate university students by exposing them to business tools used across industries.

Deloitte viewed its participating in SLU's SAP Program as an investment by contributing to building an educated workforce since students could gain experience both in working with the applications and in applying critical-thinking skills based on their interaction with consulting professionals.

In addition, Deloitte's experienced practitioners receive credits for collaborating with the university and its students, which are then applied against expectations embedded in their performance evaluations and career-development plans.

Collaborating with SLU allowed Deloitte practitioners to go beyond the traditional client-consultant environment in applying their professional skills. In working with faculty and students, consultants provided cross-functional rationale for decisions made related to system functionality and/or actions taken by end users in an educational setting. Deloitte consultants could connect with the members of tomorrow's workforce and, thus, expand the consultants' perspectives and challenge their norms for how problems are solved in the classroom and the workplace.

SLU faculty members also benefited from the Deloitte partnership. By interacting with consultants in their community, academic perspectives often become more practical, which can be helpful in preparing lab work and practicum exercises. Faculty members also built on their partnerships with Deloitte professionals to forge other connections in the overall business community.

Overall, Deloitte consultants offered SLU faculty and students three main types of skills and experience:

1. Business process knowledge and system functional experience (per module; e.g., sales and distribution (SD), materials management (MM), and financial accounting (FI)): this know-how can be leveraged to provide break-fix and error-resolution scenarios.

2. Managerial, reporting and analytical skills: these skills are useful in explaining why an ERP system is set up in a particular way and how to interpret the inputs and outputs to support business decision making, facilitate business-process execution, and/or understand system options and choices.

3. Change management know-how: this skill/know-how is critical for facilitating the introduction of new processes, work methods, and systems in an organization—includes gaining executive buy-in and promoting user adoption.

To provide the aforementioned areas of skills, knowledge, and experience to the SLU program for the curriculum's SD, MM and FI scope, Deloitte assembled a team of seven consultants, each of whom had at least five years' experience implementing SAP.

This team of consultants had remote access to the University's ERP system to identify errors and fix erroneous codes, settings, and data. Each Deloitte consultant was assigned to a faculty member so the consultant could evaluate the curriculum, provide direct coaching on using the SAP system, and present guest lectures based on real business examples.

Each team member also served as an advisor/consultant to a group of four or five students, the members of whom were jointly responsible for completing the curriculum and associated ERP system exercises. Students had the opportunity to solicit input on their exercises and to receive explanations about why their approaches produced particular results.

In continuing its partnership with SLU, Deloitte helped enhance the existing curriculum with real-life business examples and strengthen its community involvement and ongoing interaction with future users of ERP systems. Based on the knowledge gained and its positive experience thus far, Deloitte also expects to expand this type of program to other universities.

5.2   Saint Louis University's Faculty Collaboration with Deloitte

From the faculty's point of view, the value of the partnership is reflected in how Deloitte consultants helped to meet the challenges faced by faculty and students in achieving the curriculum's goals. Below, we discuss our experiences structured as four case studies: cases 1 and 2 from information technology management, case 3 from accounting information systems, and case 4 from supply chain management. The faculty perspectives offered overview the course, the challenges encountered, and the solution and results implemented in each course (Table 2).

Table 2. Four Cases of Faculty's Collaboration with Deloitte

Cases	Course	Overview	Challenges	Evolving solutions and collaboration with Deloitte
Case 1	Introduction to enterprise systems and information technology management	Students learn introductory concepts and practice hands-on ERP skills.	Numerous student mistakes and lack of understanding of an ERP system's business implications.	As the first course in collaboration with Deloitte, it prompted direct connection with Deloitte consultants.
Case 2	Enterprise systems practicum	Students learn to perform business planning and use SAP as a tool to make business decisions based on information.	Students being astute business managers while understanding the capabilities of SAP.	As the first SAP simulation course, it exemplified how Deloitte consultants serve as advisors to students helping them gain real-world experience in SAP capabilities and business decision making.

Table 2. Four Cases of Faculty's Collaboration with Deloitte

Cases	Course	Overview	Challenges	Evolving solutions and collaboration with Deloitte
Case 3	Accounting information systems	Students learn to apply ERP concepts and practices in the context of accounting.	Students' time constraint, unexpected errors and lack of buy-in on the usefulness of SAP skills.	As the first accounting course incorporating hands-on SAP skills, students gained insights of how systems work and how useful they can be in accounting with the help of Deloitte consultants.
Case 4	Supply chain management	Students learn to make tactical and strategic supply chain management decisions using SAP.	Tight student time constraints and course material lack of fit.	As the first supply chain course incorporating hands-on SAP skills, Deloitte consultants provided troubleshooting assistance and had the potential to help design future course materials.

5.2.1   Case 1: Introduction to Enterprise Systems and Information Technology Management

Overview: the first planned effort to bring enterprise education to students involved a two-part approach. Conceptual materials overviewed ERP systems and how they work and outlined the advantages of using these systems in the enterprise. Then, 20 hands-on SAP exercises deepened students' understanding of the conceptual knowledge in enterprise systems. The exercises allowed students to perform purchasing and selling functions along with the associated financial activities of paying vendors and collecting revenue from sales.

Challenges: because error debugging in SAP requires significant expertise, faculty found it difficult to troubleshoot students' mistakes. Further, students often focused myopically on successfully completing each transaction and simply clicked through screens without considering the broader business implications of the exercises.

Evolving solutions and collaboration with Deloitte: to address the challenges surrounding learning objectives and debugging student errors, we established a direct connection between Deloitte consultants and the faculty conducting the classes. The direct connection allowed Deloitte consultants to login to the SAP system and aid faculty with debugging students' errors, which mitigated the difficulty of working with a complex system. Further, the direct connection with the Deloitte consultants broadened students' focus by increasing their understanding of financial transactions and better illustrating the benefit of using ERP systems in business.

5.2.2   Case 2: Enterprise Systems Practicum

Overview: the objective of this course was to create a situation where students focus on running a business instead of learning features in the SAP product. Specifically, students performed business planning, organized themselves to address important aspects of running a business in a competitive environment, learned to use SAP as a tool to gather and analyze key information about their companies' performance, and made decisions to improve profitability. The objective was facilitated via a business simulation game (ERPsim) connected to a live SAP system. The students used SAP to consider various business decisions and to observe the resulting performance.

Challenges: once the students became familiar with the various aspects of the simulation game environment and how to use the screens in SAP to enter decisions and retrieve data about their company, they learned to use the SAP system to implement business strategies. The complexity of all these variables tended to overwhelm students and they often did not know which key pieces of data would be useful to understand their companies' problems and which SAP features would aid in diagnosing their companies' efficiency. Becoming an astute business manager while simultaneously understanding the powerful capabilities SAP has to offer was the students' biggest challenge.

Evolving solutions and collaboration with Deloitte: for years, business experience and the application of technology has been a main service offered by consulting companies. Consultants recognize the challenge facing students to understand business management principles while leveraging an ERP system. Through ongoing collaboration with Deloitte, we used a different approach to the ERP simulation

game. Each student team was assigned a Deloitte consultant with whom they could confer during the game. The arrangement mirrored real-world situations, the consultants helping the students leverage the ERP system to analyze business operations strategies. Student teams were left to contact their business consultant on their own and as needed. The goals included students learning how to better use an ERP system to obtain information about their business, learning how to analyze business operations and strategy, and appreciating the value business consultants bring to the marketplace.

5.2.3   Case 3: Accounting Information Systems

Overview: the third planned effort to bring enterprise education to students involved gradually building enterprise systems concepts and practices into an accounting curriculum in a three-phase project. Each phase built on the previous phase, where faculty presented students with exercises and modules that enhance the level of learning, which resolved issues of the previous phase and identified potential solutions for the next phase.

In the first phase of the project, we examined how well the students in an accounting class adapted to using the SD module of the enterprise system. In the second phase of the project, we investigated how well the students adapted to using the SD and MM modules of the enterprise system. In the third phase, we examined how well the students adapted to using the SD, MM, and FI modules of the enterprise system.

Challenges: we experienced challenges similar to those faced by faculty in the first two case studies. For example, students made mistakes that the faculty did not expect, which led to lower levels of adaptation to enterprise systems for accounting students. The learning experience with the SAP system was partially hindered by students' focus on how to accomplish each task rather than on why each task is necessary and by the limited time constraint inherent in the planned effort. In addition, there was divergent survey feedback from the students on the usefulness of enterprise systems.

Evolving solutions and collaboration with Deloitte: several issues resulted from the three-phase project. First, the observations throughout the three phases of the project reinforced the view that the curriculum should be designed to encourage students to reflect more on learning objectives and less on mechanical tasks. Since this partially reflects the intrinsic time constraint, we decided to allocate more time for SAP hands-on materials. Second, we investigated the issue indicated in divergent survey responses by conducting informal interviews with students and indirect surveys on technology use. We found those who had some enterprise system experience in previous IT courses were positive about SAP skills and those who lacked enterprise system experience had more concerns about learning objectives and the challenge of unexpected errors. Consistent with Alshare and Lane's (2011) findings, our solution was to focus on becoming better prepared in SAP concepts and hands-on skills, on helping to enhance students' commitment and dedication, and on gradually increasing and managing the education process's complexity. Finally, as materials and exercises increased in each successive phase, the need for a practice partner became more evident. As faculty indicated in the previous case studies, debugging unexpected student errors was the dominant challenge in the course. As part of our coordinated effort, we established a direct connection with a Deloitte consultant and the faculty teaching the course. The faculty had conference calls to illustrate potential issues and needs to the consultant and involved the consultant to help debug student mistakes and answer student questions directly.

5.2.4   Case 4: Supply Chain Management

Overview: the MBA-level supply chain management (SCM) course focused on strategic and tactical supply chain decisions including network capacity; the management of production, inventory, and logistics activities; and the operational control of materials, information, and money. As the course began, the instructor gradually enhanced the course's connection to practice by incorporating SAP-based supply chain exercises into course content. Integrating SAP into the SCM course was facilitated by the partnership with Deloitte and via a weeklong SAP University Alliance (UA) workshop designed to guide attendees through a host of SAP functions tied to operations and supply management. Three offerings of the SCM course incorporated select exercises that ranged from tactical decisions such as purchasing and materials management to more strategic analysis such as supply network design.

To assist with the integrating SAP into the SCM course, Deloitte assigned an SAP supply chain expert to work with the instructor. The Deloitte consultant provided in-class presentations outlining how the various components of the SAP system facilitate supply chain decision making. The Deloitte consultant also

assisted the instructor with the SAP UA exercises by clarifying certain aspects of the exercises and troubleshooting any discrepancies between an exercise and the SAP system.

Challenges: the primary challenge of integrating SAP into the SCM course was balancing the practice-focused SAP exercises with concept-focused course material. For example, the set of exercises guiding students through a full supply network design required 15-20 hours to complete. Dedicating in-class time to the exercises required as much as half of the semester contact hours, which left too little time for the instructor to teach the concepts necessary to understand the goals of the exercises. On the other hand, requiring the exercises to be completed outside of class also presented obstacles. Because the exercises sometimes required a high level of SAP proficiency, many students were unable to complete the exercises without assistance from the instructor and/or the Deloitte consultant. Further, the out-of-class time commitment could have been too large for MBA students who work full-time.

An alternative to the extremes of incorporating lengthy SAP exercises in-class versus out-of-class is to adopt shorter exercises. Unfortunately, the instructor found the 2-3 hour exercises provided by the SAP UA to be very narrow in scope in that they typically focused on basic SAP transactions tangentially related to course content.

Evolving solutions and collaboration with Deloitte: across three semesters of the MBA-level SCM course, the instructor experimented with the basic in-class SAP exercises (2-3 hours) and with the more strategic out-of-class SAP exercises (15-20 hours). Deloitte consultants provided valuable troubleshooting assistance across all semesters. While received both types of exercises well and while both types of exercises provided students exposure to enterprise systems software often used in practice, students who invested the time required to complete the longer exercises commented to the instructor that they were more valuable. Students also indicated interest in SAP-related presentations made by Deloitte consultants but typically expressed to more interest in the hands-on SAP exercises to the instructor.

Although efforts to integrate SAP into the curriculum of the SCM course have been beneficial, the instructor believed improvements are possible. In particular, the instructor hoped to provide students with the advantages of the lengthier SAP exercises in a shorter amount of time. One way to accomplish this may be to make the exercises less dependent on one another. Currently, the last exercise—which is closely tied to course concepts—cannot be completed before navigating the first exercises, which largely focus on configuring the SAP system in preparation for the final exercise. An ideal situation for the SCM course would allow students to focus on the more valuable final exercise without the time commitment of the preliminary exercises. In the future, a set of exercises should be developed by the SLU-Deloitte partnership or via the SAP UA that more carefully balances the benefits of hands-on, practice-focused experiences with the limited time available to teach course concepts.

5.3 Key Takeaways from the Partnership between Saint Louis University and Deloitte

We did not entirely anticipate the lessons learned and benefits gained from our partnership with Deloitte. As with any partnership, there is an evolution in which each party seeks to derive benefits aligned with their goals. Key takeaways include:

- Develop initial buy-in to provide value for both parties
- Have proper leadership from practice and academe
- Connect faculty directly with consultants early
- Develop faculty relationships with practice counterparts
- Explore in-course activities
- Recognize and show appreciation for the commitment from practice, and
- Continue to brainstorm new opportunities to keep the partnership interesting and exciting.

Moving forward, we anticipate incorporating these takeaways into SLU-Deloitte collaborations will be valuable to both parties.

6 Concluding Remarks

Our exploratory case study has provided some foundational information on how partnerships can be forged with a practice partner. The case study illustrates the different types of interactions faculty may

encounter and what may result from an ongoing partnership with practice. As more information is gathered from such partnerships, it is possible to think about what pedagogical theory one may derive from the evidence produced. Although developing such a theory is beyond the scope of this paper, the case provides initial information that could prove useful when investigating academic-practice partnerships—especially given the growing interest expressed by the AACSB. We hope to continue learning from our partnership with Deloitte and, in the future, to expand our practice partnerships beyond consulting firms.

Our work has led to several important findings. First, we found that, by selecting a high-value technology to industry such as an ERP system, academe and practice can create a meaningful partnership. Second, we discovered other methods of participation are useful beyond the common guest speaker role. Third, we learned that other benefits resulted from the partnership, such as more opportunities for our students. Lastly, we experienced a deeper commitment to participate in curriculum design focusing on practice-based skill sets for students. Although it was not a formal part of this case study, we believe that, in the future, similar partnerships can lead to joint research agendas where faculty will have opportunities to apply their research skills to some of the more plaguing problems facing the practice world.

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About the Authors

Donald E. Hardaway is an Associate Professor of Information Technology Management in the John Cook School of Business at Saint Louis University. He has a diverse industry background that includes having performed work for the Department of Energy, the EPA, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Navy, NASA, Exxon, Amoco, Shell, Atlantic Richfield, and others. In addition, he has provided feedback on new product development for Apple, and consulted on educational materials for the publishing industry and web-based instruction for Ernst & Young. He has a PhD in Information Systems and Computer Science from the University of Houston and has served in different capacities in professional and academic associations that include the Linux Foundation, Association for Computing Machinery, and the Association for Information Systems. Professor Hardaway's research interests include open source, cloud computing, enterprise technologies and emerging technologies from an application viewpoint. His publications have appeared in journals including *MIS Quarterly*, *Communications of the ACM*, and *IEEE Computer*.

Roel Harryvan is an Engagement Management Director at Deloitte Consulting LLP. He has worked with clients in the Consumer Business, Wholesale Distribution, Manufacturing, Mining and Media industries. He specializes in leading global organizations in these industries through multinational and complex business transformation projects. He is widely recognized for his skills to plan and execute strategies that deliver value and produce innovative solutions. He is a hands-on leader focused on quality and cost management while fostering productive relationships with colleagues, partners, and clients. Most recently this included helping his client to roll out a global SAP template in seven countries in the Asia Pacific region by leveraging predominantly local resources and providing system, business, and project management guidance. Within Deloitte, He leads the SAP Data Initiative and the Preconfigured Solution Method and Tools Development Team. He is the Recruiting Champion at the Missouri University for Science & Technology, and he works in close collaboration with the St Louis University School of Business' SAP Program Faculty. Before he held these positions at Deloitte, he was the Technology Leader for Deloitte's Food & Product Safety Initiative, the National leader for SAP Product Lifecycle Management, and the Consulting Leader for the St. Louis office. Outside Deloitte, he balances his professional and personal life with his family. He and his wife Monique both were born and raised in the Netherlands. They lived for two years in the United Kingdom and moved in 1995 to St. Louis, Missouri. Monique is a professional ski instructor, and their children are college students. He earned his bachelor's degree in Mechanical Engineering from West Friesland Technical College in North Holland and an Engineering Management degree from Technical University Alkmaar.

Xu (Frank) Wang is an Associate Professor of Accounting at Saint Louis University's John Cook School of Business. He has a Ph.D. in Accounting from the University of Texas at Arlington and a Master of Information Systems Management from Carnegie Mellon University. His research interests are financial reporting and information management in the capital markets. He is a member of the American Accounting Association and the American Finance Association.

Justin Goodson is an Assistant Professor of Operations & Information Technology Management at Saint Louis University's John Cook School of Business. He obtained a PhD in Management Sciences from the University of Iowa, B.S. and M.S. degrees in Industrial and Manufacturing Systems Engineering from the University of Missouri-Columbia, and a MBA from the University of Missouri-Columbia. His research interests center on sequential decision problems with uncertain information, focusing largely on problems arising in transportation and logistics. He teaches and consults in the areas of operations and supply chain analytics.