

# “If you build it, they will come”

Transforming a major corporation's business model requires a change in development approach. SAP's **Axel Ferreyrolles** talks to Nick de Cent

**W**hen SAP's Axel Ferreyrolles started putting together a new sales enablement strategy for the enterprise application software giant, he admits his approach involved a certain “act of faith”. However, he drew inspiration from a favourite movie – Kevin Costner's acclaimed 1989 film *Field of Dreams*.

Ferreyrolles, who is a senior director for sales process enablement and works for the organisation's Global Customer Organisation (GCO) University, explains his philosophy: “I'm a big fan of the movie *Field of Dreams*, which has the line ‘If you build it, they will come’; this always stuck with me and that's how I work. I knew SAP needed a transformative engine of some kind to support its ambitious goals but nobody in the organisation knew how to create it or even wanted to do so. So I just designed it and started selling it.”

Ferreyrolles and colleagues have set up a comprehensive sales enablement structure within SAP, featuring a combination of innovative programmes designed to equip the sales organisation with the perspective and skills to compete in today's complex selling environment. Integral to these initiatives has been the need to move the salespeople (known as quota carriers or QCs) and the first-line sales managers, from a transactional focus to more of a ‘transformational’ perspective.

“It was an act of faith to a certain extent by our chief operating officer (COO), and by my manager at the time, to let me do it and to give me some budget to start running it. When it came to ‘what are the benefits?’, well, the benefits were around that tipping point from transactional managers

to transformational managers, because we knew our go-to-market model and our strategy at SAP required a different type of manager. We couldn't really tell what we needed but we knew that we needed people who could enthuse innovation in their own team, in order to find new ways to engage with customers and look at problems from a different perspective. So I sold it on that notion of transformation and innovation. This is how the SAP MASTERS programme was born.”

## SAP University

But the SAP MASTERS was only the tip of the iceberg for the company: SAP had to train more than 4,500 quota carriers and over 700 front-line managers across the world – so the organisation needed a robust enablement infrastructure to deliver a unified “best-run training experience”. The company approached this remit through the concept of an SAP university.

“The notion of an SAP university appeared a few years back under the impulse of SAP CEO Bill McDermott, who said the organisation needed to look at a more standardised and scalable way to deliver training. This was a new step for us.”

Among the issues encountered by the team was the diversity of maturity among the various regions, both in terms of their profile but also the sheer variety of sales methodologies and processes across the company's regions and market units. Accordingly, the team set out to create a global structure that was standardised enough for everyone to gain the same learning experience and so move towards the company's goal of a “best-run learning experience”.

## Multiple programmes

At the global level, Ferreyrolles and his colleagues →





started designing multiple programmes: the first one looking at new hires. The background to this was that the company had started a recruitment drive but also suffered from significant turnover of talent; so, it needed a mechanism in place to handle the training of new hires – whether these were experienced salespeople or new graduates.

The “Year 1 Success” (Y1S) programme for experienced new hires involves intensive onboarding, with a full week of induction; it covers the strategy of the organisation, different product lines, solutions, industry specificities, and goals, across SAP’s own sales methodology known as the Franchise Sales Methodology (FSM). This programme then guides the new hires through their first year, along specific milestones, so that “in a year from now they are fully operational, fully effective”.

Ferreyrolles adds: “The second thing that became more and more evident was that, if we wanted to innovate within sales and have fresh blood within the organisation, we needed a way to train new graduates from universities – high-potential university people. We have therefore created what we call the ‘SAP Academy for Early Talents’.”

Based in Dublin, California, the Academy prepares SAP’s pre-sales talent (over the course of six months) and salespeople (over three months on-site) in a very structured way. On completion, the new pre-sales people and QCs join the

market units – the countries – and “actually start delivering on their jobs with a quota”. The programme is standardised in the sense that it takes place at a single location in California – the Academy.

He adds: “That was the first step towards making sure we could cope with the change we have internally and also the turnover of the QCs due to the natural shift of SAP towards the cloud.”

### First-line managers

Meanwhile, SAP also recognised that the organisation needed to invest more in developing its first-line sales managers – those managers who are essential to driving sales performance and who coach the salespeople.

“We spent lots of time training quota carriers but not so much time training front-line sales managers. In EMEA, we started developing a curriculum and I started designing it to take care of the managers. In their role, they have to manage four dimensions: *sales* – just because they are managers, it doesn’t mean they are not also salespeople; *coaching* – we always talk about coaching but, let’s face it, our managers are more about telling people than the asking questions type of profile, and they always struggle to coach their teams, so we need to coach them; of course, they need to be *leaders* to create the vision and motivate their teams; and they need to be *managers* in all the processes that we give them, the tools and the methodologies.



“So we created in October last year what we called the *SAP Academy for Sales Leaders*.” This two-week residential programme also takes place in Dublin, California, and sees managers fly to the United States to participate with their peers from all around the world in groups of 25 to 30. It takes them through leadership, coaching and management-related topics.

### Scalability and cost

SAP is moving away from large-scale external training programmes delivered in the more traditional classroom format partly because of the sheer numbers involved – it is a significant challenge to scale training across the company’s 4,500 QCs. Usually, scalability and cost considerations (travel and accommodation, in addition to the programme cost itself) mean that SAP tends to opt for a virtual approach, involving dedicated two-hour sessions around specific skills or content, such as negotiation or executive conversation.

Nevertheless, SAP has invested in CEB’s Challenger programme as part of its goal of transforming to a new sales philosophy, and has been running the programme for the past 18 months. “We have trained more than 4,300 QCs in around 268 sessions and more than 450 sales managers. We have really had great ROI (return on investment) with that programme and very good feedback from Sales because it was targeting sales behaviours. It was interesting because it was the first time we went with a mega-programme across the entire world for SAP Sales.

“When we did the survey and the analysis with CEB, we actually realised that most of our QCs are what we call relationship builders, so they like to create trust and rapport with the customer. But, in today’s situation, it is not enough; we need a bit more tension; we needed to take a bit more control of the sales cycle and we wanted to change those behaviours within our DNA.”

### Barriers to training

Industry stats and best practice from IBM suggest that you need an average of 14 days’ training per person in order to be a knowledge organisation, according to Ferreyrolles. However, time away from the business can be a significant limiting factor when it comes to the uptake of training.

“Even though salespeople appreciate when you train them, because of the pressure they are under – the current quarter pressure of the numbers – they tend not to have so much time for training. Or if they have to choose, of course, they would rather be selling, making their quota, than being

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trained. We realised we needed to find ways to motivate the account executives and, even more importantly, front-line sales managers, to absorb training.”

How could the company encourage managers to invest their time? “I started thinking about what could be a motivation for them.” A market review highlighted a Masters programme – externally accredited by Middlesex University – that development specialists Consalia were pioneering with HP. Ferreyrolles and Consalia were able to adapt this to SAP’s slightly different requirements.

“We started designing the first front-line sales managers Masters programme, called Leading Sales Transformation.” Since its inception, the programme has gone from strength to strength with the third cohort imminent. Currently, 45 managers are going through what has been devised as an elite programme: one the managers can aspire to if they wish because it involves a two-year time investment; moreover, because of the cost of the programme (some £25,000 per participant) SAP doesn’t make it available for everyone.

“It has started creating some buzz. For the first time, I don’t have to sell the programme, the programme is selling itself directly. That’s a good position to be in,” Ferreyrolles declares.

### Benefits

A major benefit of the Masters is its external accreditation. For participants with an IT background, there is the motivation of obtaining a recognised higher qualification. A big factor for many participants is the recognition that SAP has invested in them.

For the managers, the achievement also recognises their leadership capabilities, alongside their personal qualifications and their level of





professionalism. In the context of today's 'war for talent', such a programme helps SAP attract new talent and then retain it, helping to differentiate the company in the talent marketplace.

The programme has already started to "create space" for SAP managers to reflect on how they carry out their roles, what could be done differently and how they might improve. "It's only because we give them that framework – we give them that possibility to reflect – that they have started realising the path towards mastery," claims Ferreyrolles. "You give them, really, a totally different understanding of what their job is, what they should do, what they could be doing and how to transform from the inside, and how to transform their own team through coaching."

### Outcomes

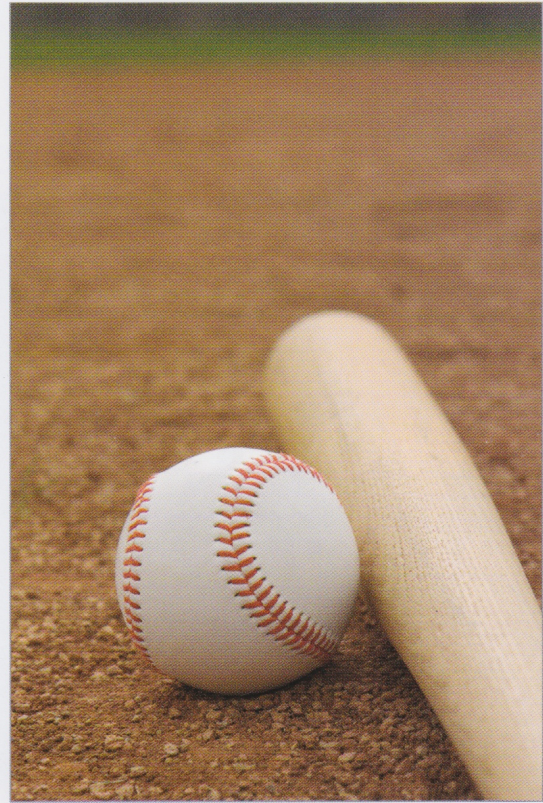
SAP is in the business transformation space, helping customers transform their business. "In order to do that, you need to have salespeople who can think that way," he argues. The new development approach has already started to pay dividends with improved performance already attributed to SAP flagship enablement programmes: Challenger Selling, Academies, Y1S and SAP MASTERS.

For instance, thanks to improved coaching by first-line sales managers, SAP has "closed deals that we should have lost". Such deals, which typically each bring in €1-2 million, more than outweigh the cost of the development programmes. The new approach has also helped drive innovation through the organisation, encouraging managers to enthuse the notion of transformation across their teams.

Additionally, Ferreyrolles has noticed that the way managers go about their coaching has changed. Previously, while managers felt they performed this function well, the QCs in the teams were dissatisfied. Now, managers have started to hone their approach and some have begun to innovate in ways that stand out.

One example is a manager in the Nordics, who has created something called "running coaching". Every time he wants to coach, he invites his colleague on a lunchtime run because coaching requires a different environment outside the office. "It is working extremely well," Ferreyrolles confirms.

These programme and others are bringing a learning shift – "a flexibility that is quite amazing". But there is one caveat; in a sense, the organisation is going to have to adjust to the success of the managers' own personal transformations. How do they balance the newly acquired skills, behaviours



and mind-set of a transformative leader with an environment that is very culturally sales driven, which is transactional, and which is based around a current-quarter, short-term focus? The organisation will have to adapt and this will be an interesting area to investigate, Ferreyrolles suggests.

For the future, SAP is adding further components to its development structure, including a new project to deliver a raft of training through MOOCs, a programme that has only started a few weeks ago. Ferreyrolles is about halfway along his personal journey towards transforming SAP's development structure together with his colleagues; however, the programmes he seeded three years ago are already starting to bear fruit. **TJ**

#### **SAP's sales development structure includes multiple approaches: divided into streams at different levels within the sales organisation**

- Streams cover knowledge, skills, behaviours and transformation
- Learning is targeted according to level – new hires, quota carriers and sales management
- Development platforms include e-learning, MOOCs, virtual, face-to-face/classroom and hybrid sessions

### Nick de Cent

is the editor of the *International Journal of Sales Transformation*. Find out more at [www.journalofsales transformation.com](http://www.journalofsales transformation.com)