

What's in a Word? - SAP Terminology.

Contributed by Berthold Kastel
Friday, 02 November 2007

One of the big frustrations people have when using SAP or working with it as contractors is that the same words have different meaning, or objects and functions are called something else in SAP than they are used to. Of course this is not a specific SAP problem. You always find this wherever somebody tries to create a standard, and this is exactly what SAP tries to do: Establish a standard for how mainly big companies do business. To achieve that, what could be better than defining the words your own way?

Let's look at some of the most frequently encountered terminology challenges:

- Budget in SAP means an approved cost plan. In other project management areas people use the term "budget" often for what in SAP would be called "planned costs", or sometimes even "planned hours".
- A "cost plan" in SAP is literally a plan on how much money will be spent to execute activities or complete WBS elements. As if that would not be enough, SAP has many different cost plans in the project management areas (structure level cost planning, primary cost planning, annual cost planning, unit cost planning, activity type cost planning). This inflation of cost planning terms is rooted in one of SAP's inherent strengths. It introduced into the project management world a wide range of elaborate controlling functions. Best of breed project management software packages simply do not have such functionality - which means that SAP is more powerful because of its superior functionality.
- Now it gets even more confusing. Activities in Primavera, or Tasks in MS Project, have several terms in SAP, depending on what module you are talking about. In PS they are called "activities", in PM they are called "operations", and in PP they may be called "operations" or "routings".

Of course I could list more confusing points or even introduce acronyms. As can be seen in the above bullets, though, the key to reducing or eliminating terminology issues is to learn specifically what is meant with such terms, which requires much more education than can be covered in this article. You can find more information about that in the sections covered under menu item "SAP Functionality".