

BEHIND THE TECHNOLOGY: A CONVERSATION WITH SAP EXPERTS

International Conference on Internal Controls,
Compliance and Risk Management

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Chris Johnston



Chris Johnston is VP, Head of Finance and Risk CSA at SAP and will be joining us in May to give the closing keynote address. We sat down with him to get a glimpse into what he will be sharing at the conference...

You're speaking about how AI is transforming risk at this event, can you give us a sneak peek into your thoughts on how AI is impacting the industry?

Well, if I'm honest, I haven't even started writing the presentation yet, firstly because I have a terrible habit of leaving things until the last minute, but secondly, the speed at which AI is changing the landscape of risk is so fast that I suspect that if I had already written it, it would be out of date by May! We have seen ChatGPT released only in November last year which had a dramatic effect on

many industries and companies and yet, the latest, significantly enhanced version GPT-4 was already released earlier this month. I believe that the opportunities created by such technology are huge, but the risks created will be varied and far-reaching.

Already we can imagine job losses, privacy violations, deepfakes, social manipulation and other risks but I believe that the biggest risk of all is apathy. AI is here and it's developing at an exponential rate so, at the very least, every risk department should be discussing it (cont.)

Are there any other big trends impacting the Controls, Compliance and Risk Management space?

Yes, lots, it's an exciting time to work in GRC. We see advances in automation which is becoming increasingly important in the risk management space where organisations are leveraging automation technologies to streamline processes, reduce errors and increase efficiencies.

Also, cyber security threats continue to grow in complexity and frequency and is now, or should be, a top priority for many organisations. Thirdly, Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) Risk is growing in importance with many companies incorporating it into their risk management strategies to mitigate risks related to climate change and social issues.

Finally, I think many organisations are now seeing the importance of linking their 'risk' departments – having a separation between risk management, controls management, compliance management and the governance within organisations is sub-optimal and inefficient but I see those barriers being broken down.

Michael Heckner



What are you most looking forward to about the event?

Listening to the presentations from our customers' experiences working with our solutions is always great but, best of all for me is just watching Risk and Controls Managers from different companies network and share their challenges, opinions, and plans.

There are always interesting conversations and it's unique to these TAC conferences that the entire room is filled with people who have similar concerns, obstacles, and duties.

It's sometimes great just to be the 'fly on the wall' and watch the value that the attendees get by spending time with each other. I'm looking forward to it!

We are pleased to have Michael Heckner, Sr. Director, EMEA Center of Excellence at SAP with us as chairperson for the event in May...

We're looking forward to having you with us Michael, but what are you most looking forward to from this event?

I am really looking forward to meeting industry experts from various large enterprises in person, to hear about their experiences, learn from them, and have a chat with them face-to-face.

What, in your opinion, are the biggest challenges facing our organizations at the moment?

I would say increasing complexity: business growth, changing and challenging conditions (such as the pandemic, supply chain risks, inflation, stepped up regulations, de-globalization, cybersecurity risks, etc. to name but a few). (cont.)

If you just think of the growing interconnectedness of our IT systems, the amount of straight-through processing, real-time transactions, along the entire value chain, it is clear that our GRC approach needs to keep up with the speed and volumes of our business transactions.

We need to do “more GRC” to keep up with the pace. And at the same time, we need to free up time for our key talent from repetitive, mundane task, so that they can be agile to adopt to the changes and guide the business in the right direction – based on solid GRC assurance.

You’ll also be co-hosting one of the pre-conference workshops on “Automating the 3 Lines for Beginners” can you give us a sneak peek into what delegates can expect from this workshop?

This is for delegates who don’t have a long-standing experience with SAP GRC. For these “beginners”, we plan to provide a concise overview over the various options SAP GRC solutions provide out-of-the-box to automate GRC process and move to continuous monitoring.

Attendees should leave the workshop with a “bag of good ideas” for where you can put “out-of-the-box” automation to work and get quick wins for your organization.

Thomas Frénéhard



Thomas Frénéhard, Senior Manager in Solution Management, will be joining us as one of our workshop leaders. He shares his thoughts on the upcoming event...

What are the key themes in Control, Compliance and Risk Management that you are looking forward to discussing with delegates?

One theme I am really looking forward to discussing with attendees is what is referred to as the “Visibility Gap” which is when Enterprise Risk Management and cyber security are disjointed. More and more companies are bringing the 2 worlds together to get complete visibility on their risk posture and there are definitely lessons learned

from companies that have already embarked on this path that I just can’t wait to hear about. Another topic that is on everyone’s mind at the moment relates to better leveraging data to make decisions – and to drive more efficient compliance initiative and initiatives improve operations.

We were pleased that you joined us last year in Dublin, so are there any new updates from your session last year that delegates can look forward to learning about? (cont.)

Let me start by saying that I really enjoyed the Dublin event. After COVID, it was great to be able to get back onsite and have face-to-face discussions with delegates. Concerning new updates: absolutely!

You may recall that we had introduced a brand new cloud internal control solution in Dublin: SAP Financial Compliance Management that had just been launched. This year, we'll have a section of the pre-conference workshop dedicated to this solution and we will of course go over the new capabilities that have been added.

Something else that I think is worth highlighting is the "What is Available out-of-the-box with SAP Solutions for 3 Lines" session. Last year, Michael Heckner and I briefly mentioned this topic during our overview of Enterprise Risk and Compliance solutions and there were many questions from customers for more details on this particular topic.

I really think that we really took onboard this feedback and that this year's session delivered by Michael Heckner and Marie-Luise Wagener-Kirchner will provide the details that attendees can then take home (well, to the office really) and start using straight away.

What are you most looking forward to about attending this event?

Without a doubt: customer sessions. I love to hear how customers are using the solutions, the challenges they have sometimes encountered, how they overcame them and any tips and tricks they can share with the audience.

To me, this is of course valuable for all organizations: customers already using the software who can get new ideas but also companies looking for more automated tools who decide whether this can help them or not.

From a Solution Management side, we work with Engineering teams on crafting software solutions for particular business cases. The reality is sometimes different to what we had in mind and customer sessions provide us with the direct input we need to help us continuously improve our solutions.



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