

Co-Innovation, Simplicity, and Scale: Microsoft's Wael Elkabbany Unpacks Microsoft's Vision for SAP Co-Innovation



Wael Elkabbany

Vice President of Strategic Global Partnerships for SAP, Microsoft

As Microsoft's new Vice President of Strategic Global Partnerships for SAP, Wael Elkabbany is helping steer one of the tech industry's most influential alliances at a time of accelerated customer demand for AI-enabled, cloud-based transformation. With nearly a decade of Microsoft leadership across Africa and the broader EMEA region including roles leading the Africa Regional Cluster and the Africa Transformation Office, Elkabbany brings firsthand insight into how large-scale innovation agendas get translated into operational outcomes.

Q: Before stepping into your current role, you served as Vice President of Partners for Europe, the Middle East, and Africa (EMEA) at Microsoft, and you've worked in the enterprise technology space for 30 years. How has that background prepared you for this role?

I joined Microsoft about eight years back. I joined to lead the enterprise business for Microsoft in the Middle East and Africa, leading our commercial businesses, industries, and customer engagement and management. I also ran Africa for Microsoft for a couple of years. During that period, I was responsible for engagements with the respective governments and partner ecosystems, as well as the respective

In this global role, he leads strategic alignment efforts across the SAP partnership, helping drive co-innovation, platform strategy, and go-to-market execution across cloud, ERP, and AI. Now charged with deepening collaboration between SAP and Microsoft, Elkabbany sees the partnership as a critical engine for helping enterprises simplify landscapes, unlock intelligent ERP, and scale generative AI use cases responsibly.

In this conversation, Elkabbany reflects on how customer expectations are evolving, what's next for SAP Business Technology Platform (BTP) and Joule, and how both SAP and Microsoft are working together to turn complexity into competitive advantage.

This conversation has been edited and condensed for clarity.

bodies and non-governmental organizations operating across the continent.

For the last two years, as you mentioned, I ran the partner ecosystem across Europe, the Middle East, and Africa. With that job, as you can imagine, I was driving the business with three categories of partners. Category one, which was our channel partners—the ones who are driving business at scale across Europe, the Middle East, and Africa—is key in terms of activating any mid-market activities. It's important for SAP and other partners as well.

I was also responsible for the business of enablement and go-to-market with our top Global Systems

Integrators (GSIs)—the top global system integrators and national system integrators, who are key in terms of the way that they are developing, deploying, and taking the SAP book of business into the respective market. My experience with that contingent of partners was also critically important, including some of the partners we call “high-value advisories,” like Boston Consulting Group, McKinsey, and Bain.

Finally came the ISV ecosystem, of which SAP is a part. I was responsible for activating SAP, selling with SAP, and driving the go-to-market activation across the markets of Europe, the Middle East, and Africa. As you can imagine, some of those were mature markets with sophisticated and large deals all the way, and others were emerging markets, where I was driving the activation and development of that ISV ecosystem. This end-to-end experience gave me significant knowledge and understanding that has enabled me to drive the SAP business unit in this current role and function.

Q: Tell us about your new role at Microsoft. What are your roles and responsibilities, and what does a typical day in the life look like for you?

There’s a lot happening with this role and function, even in addition to those strategies we are developing with SAP and executing with partners and SIs. That’s taking up most of my time right now—activating partners to drive maximum innovation, especially around the AI landscape we’re working on with SAP, including SAP Business AI, SAP Business Technology Platform (SAP BTP), and SAP Business Data Cloud. All of those require a lot of expertise, knowledge, and experience that we’re developing with those SIs.

I’m also spending time establishing connections with the SAP senior leadership team and executives responsible for various functions, from product owners to geographical Chief Revenue Officers (CROs), including those responsible for the revenue book of business, engineering rollout, and future planning.

From the engineering perspective, we are examining our joint innovation agenda with SAP—taking the work we’re doing and developing immediate tactical initiatives, as well as medium- and long-term innovation plans that we’re building between both engineering teams.

It’s been a busy start. I also just came back from Walldorf, where I spent time with the SAP team. Lots of exciting announcements are in the works, and I returned with updates that I hope will drive our work forward over the coming months.



Q: What is your vision for driving Microsoft's success in the SAP ecosystem through this new role?

The innovation agenda between SAP and Microsoft is a 30-year-old discussion, from our work around SQL and SAP R/3 in 1997 to recent announcements around collaboration on Teams, the collaboration of Microsoft Copilot with Joule, and the number of streams we announced at SAP Sapphire.

It's a rich dialogue happening between the two companies, and we've been very busy over the past few months crafting the work between the engineering teams to drive the innovation agenda that caters to many of the requests our customers have been making of Microsoft and SAP.

Elements like the work in our data centers, which we have with SAP around high-availability SLAs, are clearly important for the SAP Cloud infrastructure to be enterprise-grade. Having 99.95% availability in the market is crucial for many of our customers.

SAP is announcing the general availability of Joule integration with Copilot, with more announcements coming. This is key for the market, as well as for us to take it forward.

We have also worked extensively over the past few months to craft our mid-market agenda, ensuring we enable Microsoft and SAP to capture the opportunity in the SAP mid-market, particularly addressing some of the gaps present in our GTM partner activation model. We wanted to make sure we're availing the best of the partner ecosystem for SAP and Microsoft customers. So, it was great to jointly announce the SAP Business Suite Acceleration Program with Microsoft Cloud at SAP Sapphire in Madrid.

A lot is also happening on the security front, especially around Sentinel for SAP, Defender for SAP, and Agent ID. We have several key modules that are important—especially in today's security-centered environment—that will bring the best of our security stack to the SAP estate and ensure it secures the SAP ecosystem.

It was a busy period. We were super excited about the agenda we had and the announcements we put together for Sapphire. And we're not going to stop there. We have interesting dialogues happening today between Microsoft and SAP regarding the work we will be doing with them for the mid-term innovation agenda, which we're currently busy developing with Microsoft and the SAP executives.

Q: At SAP Sapphire last year, it was announced that Joule will be integrated with Microsoft Copilot to create a unified work experience for business users. Looking ahead, how do you see emerging technologies like AI and machine learning influencing the future of the Microsoft-SAP partnership?

I genuinely believe that the Joule integration—enabling reasoning over structured and unstructured data, as well as leveraging the rich data state of the SAP environment and the Microsoft data graph to be mined via a user interface, such as Copilot/Joule—will drive value for our customers worldwide.

It will democratize the Gen AI capability and capacity to thousands of customers and extend that to the rest of the state between Microsoft and SAP. It will not only serve existing customers but also become one of the catalysts that helps SAP and Microsoft acquire many greenfield customers, expanding our reach and potential.

You've seen many of the Microsoft announcements around agentic AI: how to take that forward within the agentic AI framework and how to ensure that we're enabling our customers with agentic AI capabilities as well. This is the vision for taking that Joule integration into the future.

Both companies have immense experience with the agentic AI capacity and capability developed over the past few months. A lot of that will come as almost the next phase of this work. Data coming from the SAP BTP environment, SAP Business Data Cloud, Azure Databricks, Microsoft Graph, and Microsoft Fabric—activating that data state with Gen AI and machine learning will unleash a lot of potential for SAP and Microsoft customers. That will enable them to capture that potential and monetize the data estate they have and embark on new services that will help them with the transformation journey at a much faster pace.

Q: How can the Microsoft-SAP partnership accelerate digital transformation for enterprises, especially in emerging markets?

If you take the current state of what we have on track today between SAP and Microsoft, I think we have all that's needed to activate that market.

What was missing was the ability to activate the partner ecosystem more effectively—the Microsoft and SAP partner ecosystems—to drive that type of transformation in top enterprises, as well as in the scale market or the SAP mid-market.

Partners have the right levels of incentives and expertise, I would say. However, they were lacking several key elements, including partner-marketing-as-a-service—insight signals, presales funds, and post-sales funds—to enable them to take their customers on a more programmatic transformation journey.

We've been working diligently with SAP over the past weeks to develop the SAP Business Suite Acceleration Program with Microsoft Cloud, which will help take that book of business to the next level and accelerate the transformation story.

This will be particularly fitting for emerging markets, as many of them are partner-led and partner-dependent. Those partners had the expertise but lacked the right model, infrastructure, and capabilities to drive that transformation forward at a faster pace. Both emerging and mature markets will benefit from the collaboration we're driving between Microsoft and SAP.



Q: In your experience, what makes Microsoft and SAP such effective partners for the modern, global, intelligent enterprise?

One consideration is the joint customer base. Microsoft has been one of the leading players in most of the world's top enterprise market segments. Therefore, both Microsoft and SAP interact with the same customers. Both of us have the same pre-sales and post-sales structure in the market. We address the same customers from different angles of operations.

The depth of Microsoft's experience and the innovation we drive is unmatched by other players in the market but, more importantly, it's the wealth of what we call the modernize-and-innovate agenda that Microsoft has around the SAP estate. From our AI capabilities and capacity to the infrastructure we have with Azure, the data services we provide around SAP, and—crucially—the security governance and compliance services that Microsoft offers, that wealth of services is vital.

Another key differentiator is the presence of tens of thousands of Microsoft partners operating worldwide within our ecosystem. We have several industry-specialized ISVs running on Azure and connected to the SAP estate. They're maximizing the impact to customers and minimizing the time to value. Microsoft has one of the most robust enterprise-grade ISV ecosystems in the world, which is another significant differentiator.

We also can't forget the work and investment we've made over the past at least four or five years with several of our GSIs—building their SAP practices on Azure, working with them around the expertise they need to have in their industry practices. We've

worked with the top GSIs to serve the SAP agenda comprehensively—to those who drive SAP change management modules, including McKinsey, BCG, Bain, and others who work hand-in-hand with Microsoft across the entire landscape that enables and surrounds the SAP estate for all customers.

Those are, in my mind, the top key differentiators. This is why, for many enterprises worldwide, the default direction is toward the Microsoft-SAP alliance.

Connect with Wael Elkabbany on LinkedIn.



Q: What is the most important consideration right now for executives preparing for the digital transformation of their businesses? What do you advise customers to focus on that might not always be top of mind for those embarking on these types of journeys?

Currently, a significant differentiator for customers and partners is the innovation agenda that they run—the board, management, and even team levels. This always-on innovation agenda should be almost like a continuous practice that occurs between customers and partners alike.

For our partners within the ASUG community, the 'build around, extend, and then innovate' story between Microsoft and SAP is key. If you don't have your expertise ready already, then please, let's make sure that we drive that together. Both SAP and Microsoft have a joint ISV ecosystem. It's essential for customers and partners to identify those joint ISVs that drive either industry or geographical presence and lead the agenda from start to finish.

Another key point concerns the AI and agentic AI framework. We've developed numerous out-of-the-box tools to help you achieve maximum time-to-value, whether it's Copilot or one of our other services. Then, you can take it to the customized agentic AI or Gen AI framework, where we can jointly develop together.

So, just before you enter the development phase of building a Gen AI value proposition, I think using and equipping your teams with Gen AI out-of-the-box capabilities will bring significant value. That way, when you go and develop your next phase of Gen AI or agentic AI frameworks, you're building on the experience and readiness of your team members as well.

Q: At SAP Sapphire this year, Microsoft and SAP announced the SAP Business Suite Acceleration Program with Microsoft Cloud, specifically aimed at accelerating time-to-value for cloud-forward companies. What can you tell our readers about Microsoft and SAP's approach to this end-to-end program?

In my mind, this is one of the most important and strategic announcements we've made this year with SAP. It reaches the highest impact that SAP and Microsoft can drive globally—specifically targeting the mid-market and smaller customer segments of SAP and Microsoft.

It is a structured, supported, and comprehensive end-to-end program to help customers and partners supporting the mid-market segment accelerate the impact of SAP and Microsoft value propositions.

It is an initiative that has the right level of investment in the partner ecosystem to enable the partners to take advantage of the assets and value propositions

Microsoft and SAP offer in an end-to-end way, to bring those mid-market customers the next-gen services or solutions from SAP—which is GROW and RISE, or the SAP Business Suite—as well as the technologies and AI solutions from Microsoft.

The program is a global initiative. It will be launched across the Americas, EMEA, and Asia-Pacific, and it will be a scaled initiative that drives impact across the mid-market landscape.

It's a unified go-to-market strategy—but it's not just for SAP and Microsoft. There are also SI partners; within this program, Microsoft and SAP support and guide these partners, providing them with a framework to work within to ensure the level of integration needed to create a seamless customer experience.

The program's endgame is to benefit customers, but it is partner-led. It's a program designed for SIs and channel partners to truly leverage all the value propositions and investments that Microsoft and SAP can bring together.

So, yes, exactly to that point—it's basically giving a lot of our investments, tools, and marketing services to those partners to enable customers to cut the value chain and recognize the impact-to-value time discussion.



Q: In addition, Microsoft Azure is the first cloud provider to enable SAP's 99.95% SLA option for SAP Cloud ERP Private. That's very high availability for thousands of SAP customers selecting RISE with SAP. How did that collaboration come about? What does that symbolize?

This is what I call customer-driven innovation. When we first worked with SAP to bring many of our top global customers to a RISE state or convey the RISE value proposition, we encountered concerns about availability. The infrastructure, network, hardware, and software—everything was not geared enough to deliver a 99.95% SLA value proposition.

We've worked closely with SAP over the past few months to architect, design, and establish the operations and metrics that support this type of value proposition. In my mind, this will give a lot of top clients who cannot afford downtime in their operations the opportunity to adopt this service. It's a highly important service that was driven primarily by customer demand.

The entire software, hardware, and network development stack needed to be changed. Sometimes, SAP needed to do that work; sometimes, we needed to do it on our side; and sometimes, even data center and hardware innovations needed to happen for us to achieve 99.95%.

Each party played its role in bringing the high-availability solution to life. The customer benefit is extremely clear: the ability to run mission-critical applications 24/7 with minimal downtime and fast recovery time.

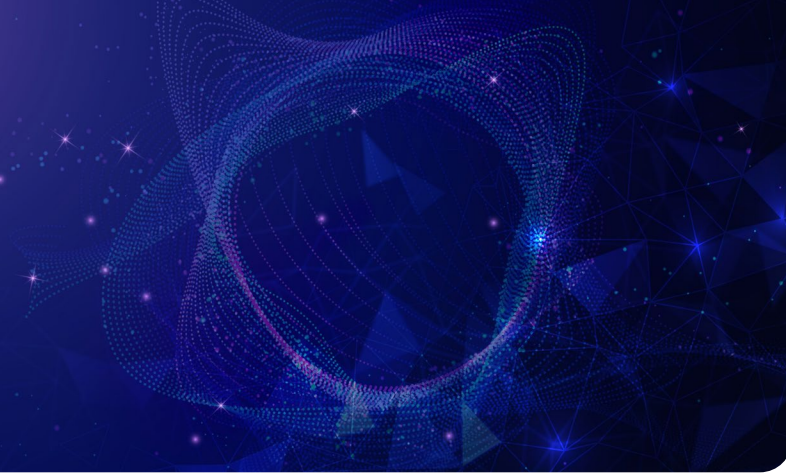
Q: With SAP Business Data Cloud and SAP Databricks launching on Azure, Microsoft has a distinct edge, given your first-party Azure Databricks service. How can customers benefit from Microsoft's support of these latest SAP offerings?

Databricks has been a first-party value proposition on our side for years. We have thousands of customers using Databricks services, and this number continues to grow.

What's exciting about this announcement is that we're now going live with Databricks as an integrated value proposition within SAP Business Data Cloud. That means the entire value stack and experience we've developed with Databricks over the past three years will be integrated with SAP Business Data Cloud, enabling much more reasoning over SAP's structured data.

Additionally, Microsoft's ability to utilize Databricks to reason over both structured and unstructured data, as well as Microsoft's data graph, will be enabled.

Customers will benefit from this as a product value proposition. They won't need to go through any level of customization to reach that level of reasoning and that number of AI use cases. If I were a customer, I'd be excited that this is happening now, in a structured, value-proposition way between Microsoft, Databricks, and SAP.



Q: With the general availability of Joule in Microsoft 365 Copilot, what's your vision for how this digital copilot can accelerate enterprise productivity, and what feedback from customers did you receive during the limited preview this past year?

The general availability of Joule and Microsoft Copilot was one of the most eagerly awaited announcements by customers. As you can imagine, many of the cloud journeys SAP customers are undertaking are focused on delivering Gen AI capability in their new estate.

Copilot and Joule's integration brings that to life in a natural language processing model, using Joule and Copilot to empower every single user—whether it's an SAP user or an institutional user within the organization using the Microsoft Graph or the SAP estate. I was happy to see that the Joule and Copilot sessions during Sapphire were among the most attended, both in Orlando and Madrid. Customers were all over the place and looking to see this product live and in action.

Our private preview customers have given positive feedback. It had a real impact on their businesses and enabled power users. It became more about how they could foster broader-scale usage of Joule and Copilot within their organization rather than just the power users we focused on during the private preview.

It's going to go a long way. The joint development roadmap between Joule and Copilot is promising and impactful. I'm excited to see the work happening here. This area also stands to deliver the fastest time-to-value and time-to-market proposition for any SAP and Microsoft customers using an AI solution—because these are first-party developed products with a proven track record over the estates and graphs they're reasoning about. Before you undertake any development cycle of Gen AI capability, this is the closest and easiest use case you can achieve within an organization.

Q: Are there any other key announcements or top takeaways you'd like to share coming out of SAP Sapphire?

This was the first Sapphire I attended, and it was exciting to see the amount of energy around the future of SAP—how the entire Business Suite is evolving and trying to simplify value for customers. Simplicity was one common theme throughout the SAP presentations; innovation was another.

When it comes to innovation, it was really about reasoning, utilizing, and monetizing the customer data layer. I genuinely believe that Microsoft is best positioned to deliver our full value proposition around SAP, given our over 30 years of innovation in the SAP estate.

I came in at the right moment in terms of this partnership between Microsoft and SAP. I genuinely believe the value proposition we have is a strategic fit for SAP and Microsoft. We'll be able to bring maximum value to customers in the coming months and years.

Learn more about SAP on Microsoft Cloud via Microsoft Azure.





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ASUG is the world’s largest SAP user group. Originally founded by a group of visionary SAP customers in 1991, its mission is to help people and organizations get the most value from their investment in SAP technology. ASUG currently serves thousands of businesses via companywide memberships, connecting more than 130,000 professionals with networking and educational resources to help them master new challenges. Through in-person and virtual events, on-demand digital resources, and ongoing advocacy for its membership, ASUG helps SAP customers make more possible.