

# Inside sovanta's Human-Centered Approach to SAP Modernization



**Sven Arndt**  
CTO  
sovanta America

*After 15 years spent helping to shape sovanta's identity as a UX-driven, cloud-native partner in the SAP ecosystem, Sven Arndt recently elected to oversee the company's U.S. operations up close by personally relocating to Newtown Square, PA, near SAP's North American headquarters, in a move that reflects sovanta's deepening strategic focus on the North American market.*

*As new CTO of sovanta America Inc., Arndt played a central role in evolving the company from a UX-first SAP partner into a trusted innovation specialist, known for its user-centric design, cloud-native development, and pragmatic clean core methodology.*

*Unlike traditional S/4HANA implementation firms, sovanta has carved out a role focused on helping customers modernize how they build on SAP through side-by-side extensions on SAP BTP, rapid prototyping, and embedded design thinking.*

*In this conversation, Arndt traces both his personal journey and sovanta's evolution, from early mobile innovations and DevOps practices to co-innovation projects with SAP and the launch of the firm's Innovation Factory accelerator. Arndt also offers a candid look at the real challenges enterprises face in pursuing a clean core strategy, from cultural resistance to governance gaps, and how sovanta's approach meets customers where they are.*

*This interview has been edited and condensed for length and clarity.*

## **Q: How did you first come to sovanta, and what can you tell us about how your role there has evolved over the years?**

I started my journey with sovanta 15 years ago, joining as the third developer on the team. Before that, I worked in a versatile role as a software and system engineer on a project handling processing of international payments for a major search engine provider. I was able to learn a lot in those four years at the previous company, working on large enterprise-scale applications.

At sovanta, I was fortunate to help shape our development organization, instead of just building side-by-side extensions, from the beginning. I was hired as a mobile developer for iOS applications, which at the time was a completely new opportunity.

With the iPad and iPhone then being released, everybody was curious to get their hands on iOS. The user experience was revolutionary.

That was a starting point. Over time, I developed a passion for human-centered methodologies, and I was thrilled at sovanta to be immersed in cutting-edge technologies. To get hands-on with augmented reality (AR), for example—while identifying what technologies could help businesses drive innovation, improve user experience, and add value to processes—was very exciting.

I also had the chance to build up our DevOps methodology at sovanta, starting with build and test automation, driving that into our organization to improve software quality and processing through continuous deployment. At my previous company,

we engaged in plenty of payment activities, so I also developed an interest in software and IT security. We build management applications, and they need to be secure, so I focused on what we could do for security, sandboxing, encryption, and privacy. I also became a data privacy officer at sovanta, giving me rich insights into the company's pressing needs.

Another area I was excited to explore deeply was cloud computing, starting with GCP, then proceeding to projects with customers on AWS and Azure. This started around 2013, before SAP had a clear approach to providing a cloud platform. We were doing side-by-side extensions and needed to see how we could improve development speed and flexibility, and that allowed me to explore all of that. In 2016, I also became involved in projects that today would fall under AI, though at the time they were more about data science, working with machine learning algorithms and natural language understanding/processing. I was happy to have this variety to explore.

**Q: Everything you shared about working in co-innovation with SAP highlights how sovanta has carved out a niche for itself in the SAP ecosystem. We hear a lot about S/4HANA implementation partners, but you're more specialized, focusing on the human-centric methodology you mentioned for BTP, AI, and clean core. What can you say about that distinction and how sovanta puts that expertise into practice?**

We've never seen ourselves as a traditional S/4HANA implementation partner. At sovanta, our role has always been that of an innovation and extension partner, combining a human-centered methodology with cloud-native development to accelerate innovation cycles and deliver tangible business outcomes.

Connect with Sven Arndt  
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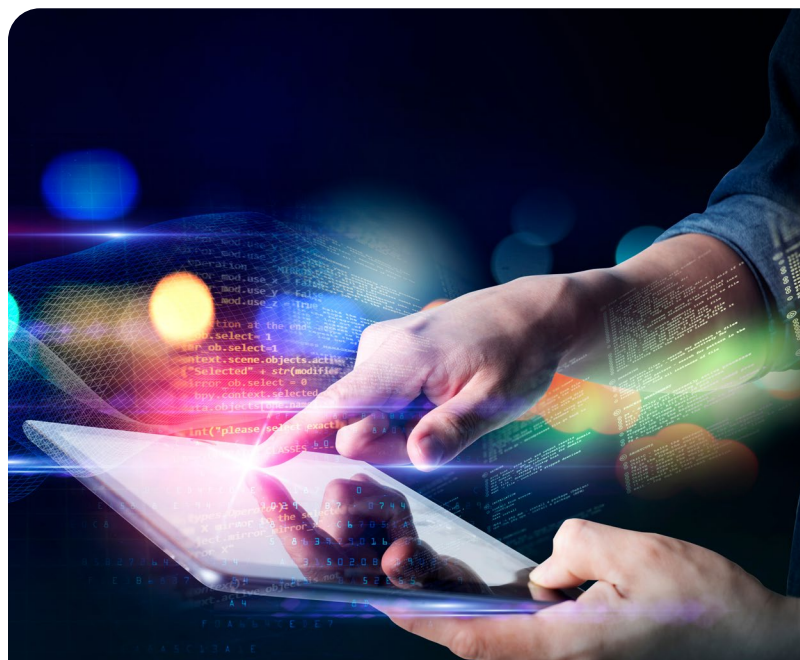


We recognized early on that AI and machine learning would become important; even before clean core was introduced, we were living those principles.

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We explored SAP Cloud Platform from its early stages, evaluating it for development; once SAP brought out BTP, we realized it naturally aligned with our DNA. What we were doing on other cloud platforms and projects aligned with BTP showed us this was our place in the SAP ecosystem. We could bring the best value to customers, showing them how to drive differentiation and innovation efficiently while keeping the core clean and leveraging best practices of cloud-native software development.

With our methodological and technical expertise, we operate across multiple lines of business. Naturally, we are more deeply rooted in some areas than others, but our technical excellence and strong grasp of user-centric logic enable us to deliver great solutions in any domain. By applying the right technologies and methods, we help our customers continuously improve their business processes. Whether it's on-stack, in-app, or side-by-side extensions, we evaluate and select the most suitable approach.



**Q: Clean core is an idea SAP has worked to communicate, but it's really a methodology that requires a mindset shift. In your experience, what challenges do customers face when transitioning to a clean core architecture? And how is sovanta positioned to help them navigate those challenges?**

We do believe in the clean core approach, but we are not dogmatic about it; we take a pragmatic approach. That balance is important, because customers often come from a deeply rooted customization culture; everything needs to be customized and done differently. What's frequently missing is the step back to think, "What is the real end-user demand? Do we really have to deviate from the standard?" The first challenge is shifting from assumptions about what users might need to a clear understanding of real business demand.

A second challenge we see is that customers often underestimate the potential of SAP BTP and the surrounding solutions. The pace of innovation in the cloud is fast, and after more than ten years of experience, we know it requires a mindset shift and cultural change to keep up. Customers can't know everything, but without this awareness they often miss opportunities.

Governance is another pain point that is often missed in the journey. Many organizations miss to provide guidelines on how to evolve and use new technologies. This often originates in the resistance to change and the challenge of taking people along on the journey.

This is where sovanta comes in. We guide companies through holistic transformations, not just from ECC to S/4, but also taking the organization and people along to evolve technically, strategically, and culturally. We help break up silos between operations teams, Basis teams, development teams, and ensure that people, not just systems, evolve during the transformation. For us, clean core is more than a technical migration; it's

an organizational journey, and we are well-positioned to help our customers succeed in it.

**Q: I love what you're saying about evolving technically, strategically, and culturally. On the balance between customization and keeping the core clean, how does sovanta guide clients in establishing governance frameworks that support those principles over time?**

As I mentioned, our approach is always pragmatic. Every business need must be evaluated based on the value it creates. Each customer has a unique goal, so while the clean core principles provide a foundation, the governance framework must be shaped individually. Customers often ask SAP for universal guidelines, but there is no one-size-fits-all. That's why we have developed a structure that starts with understanding the customers' organization, strategy, and demands. From there, we derive a tailored governance concept that guides them sustainably on their journey.

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It's important to clarify that clean core doesn't mean there cannot be any customization. Customizations still have their place. We help customers evaluate how a requirement can be realized, whether it can be addressed through standard processes, key user extensibility, lightweight on-stack adjustments, or side-by-side extensions. There is always a trade-off, and the key is transparency in decision-making.

Our holistic approach ensures that governance is not just about rules and restrictions, but about aligning business needs with technical possibilities. This helps organizations strike the right balance between innovation and stability, so their clean core strategy remains viable over time.





**Q: What can you say about the sovanta Innovation Factory?**

We had this vision for the sovanta Innovation Factory for several years. We had envisioned a BTP Accelerator because we realized that our methodologies, particularly for running extension projects and applying design thinking, were key factors for our success. At first, we built it for ourselves, to improve our internal processes and leverage best practices across projects. But it quickly became clear that it could create significant value for our customers.

The Innovation Factory combines templates, best practices, and lessons learned from over 15 years of real-world projects. We've documented both our successes and mistakes so that our teams, and now also our customers, can benefit from that knowledge. The result is a guided, transparent process that helps scale innovation and make progress visible. Transparency is one of our core principles, and the sovanta Innovation Factory makes this tangible.

In developing this tool, we applied a rapid prototyping approach, defining what we wanted to achieve and iterating quickly. Now that it's live, we use it to support clients with enablement, adoption, monitoring of projects, and knowledge transfer so they can

also learn and benefit from our experience. It helps reduce time to value by not reinventing the wheel but leveraging best practices that fit the current situation. With our different blueprints, we can help each customer make the right decision to accelerate their journey.

**Q: Can you talk about the BTP Centers of Excellence and about working with SAP to establish them? This builds on much of what sovanta developed in the BTP Accelerator.**

There's a strong connection between our BTP Accelerator, our project experience, and the learnings that came out of both. Much of what we built into the Accelerator directly supported the foundation for our BTP Center of Excellence (CoE) work. The BTP CoE activities started for us about two to three years ago when several customers needed guidance on how to get started with the BTP and establishing the right governance. We leveraged the experience from our past projects, and with the Innovation Factory could turn these insights into best practices and governance concepts.

One of our first customers on this journey was Heinemann, a global leader in duty-free retail. We helped them design a governance framework and establish their own BTP CoE to manage innovation and adoption effectively.

Since then, we've developed a close collaboration with SAP, maintaining a regular exchange with their enterprise architects to align and co-innovate on how a CoE can best be structured and scaled. This partnership helps customers build maturity faster and in a measurable way. We also work closely with SAP's Best Practices team, sharing insights from our customer projects and incorporating theirs, to continually refine the CoE approach.

Over the years, this collaboration has built trust between SAP and us, allowing us to help customers in the best way possible.

**Q: What does your move to Newtown Square signal for the future of your BTP work, AI, and clean core efforts at sovanta?**

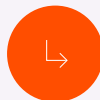
In Germany, I was fortunate to build up our consulting activities together with an outstanding team, serving customers across the German-speaking market. When we launched our U.S. go-to-market strategy last year, I became involved in several initiatives there and saw a lot of potential to contribute our experience in areas like BTP, AI, and clean core.

What struck me most was the openness and curiosity of U.S. customers. Many organizations are at the beginning of their journey with BTP and are eager to learn how to approach transformation strategically and sustainably. That creates a great opportunity for exchange — to bring our European project experience to the table while also learning from the unique challenges and dynamics of the U.S. market.

Having built a strong, capable team in Germany, I can now focus on driving our next chapter from Newtown Square, close to SAP's U.S. headquarters, just as Heidelberg is close to Walldorf. That proximity allows for close collaboration with SAP and our partners, something that has always been central to sovanta's way of working.

I'm excited to continue developing our work around BTP, AI, and clean core in the U.S., helping customers accelerate their innovation journeys and building strong connections between the SAP ecosystem in Europe and North America. This move is really about collaboration, learning, and growth — taking what works well in one market and evolving it together with new partners and customers.

**Visit the sovanta website.**





At sovanta, we believe innovation is only valuable when it creates real impact. We help companies achieve true differentiation where it matters most – with smart extensions, scalable architectures, and strategic AI solutions. We support them in aligning closely with SAP's Clean Core approach and help to identify where it's worth deviating to create real value.

Our approach: Combining the right methodology with cutting-edge technology.



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.