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Q&A
BRAD NICOLAISEN, SVP OF GROWTH & AI INNOVATION AT TOTALTEK

TotalTek

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DISCUSSING THE FORCE-MULTIPLYING EFFECT OF AI WITHIN THE SAP ECOSYSTEM.

Q Brad, for people who don't live in the SAP world every day, how do you explain the "force-multiplying" effect of AI?

A I'd explain it like this: SAP teams have the skills and data but often don't have the time to make the most of both. That's where AI steps in. AI takes care of repetitive analysis, spots patterns, cross-references data, and handles tasks that are too much for humans to do all the time. It learns from your tickets, changes, and processes, boosting the team's productivity and accuracy. The change is instant. You go from fixing problems as they come up to preventing them altogether. This is the force-multiplying effect: the same team, the same SAP setup, but with a big boost in stability, speed, and overall impact.

Q Where are you seeing the most immediate, practical AI use cases in the SAP ecosystem right now?

A I see three areas where AI is delivering real impact today.

First are SAP projects and support.

This is where AI is sprinting ahead. We use it at TotalTek to reverse-engineer specification documents from existing code so our teams start in minutes instead of days. AI also rips through thousands of tickets and exposes the patterns, hotspots, and repeat failures humans never have time to see. My upcoming February feature in Business Enquirer goes deep on this because ticket history is the real MRI of an SAP system.

Second is AI inside core SAP business processes.

Invoice processing, accounts payable, order to cash, procure to pay. AI is classifying documents, spotting

anomalies, routing approvals, and flagging odd patterns before they become fires. The work moves faster and cleaner, and companies stop relying on institutional knowledge to keep the machine running.

Third is conversational AI and digital assistants.

Employees stop fighting SAP menus and just ask for what they need. Leave requests, purchase order status, basic IT help. Done in seconds. It removes friction and drops ticket volume immediately.

These three areas are producing fast ROI and quietly rewriting how SAP organizations operate.

Q A lot of SAP leaders are skeptical because they've seen "transformation" buzzwords come and go. What's different this time?

A The skepticism is healthy. SAP teams have been sold every buzzword you can imagine: digital transformation, cloud journeys, intelligent enterprise, you name it. What's different with AI is the speed from idea to proof.

You don't need a 24-month program to see if AI is useful. If we can't show a meaningful signal in your real ticket data, change history, or process logs in 3–6 weeks, then either the use case is wrong, the data is garbage, or the partner doesn't know what they're doing.

AI earns trust when it is applied to a very specific problem, measured with real KPIs (not slideware), and embedded into day-to-day work. If those three aren't true, it's just another buzzword.

Q You often talk about "hidden costs" inside SAP AMS. How does AI help uncover them?

A Most AMS scorecards lie by omission. They show SLAs: response time, resolution time, backlog levels. What they don't show is how much productivity is being lost, how many times the same issue keeps coming back, or which changes silently destabilize the environment.

AI can analyze thousands of tickets, changes, notes, and logs and surface patterns humans rarely have time to see. For example, "These 12 incident types account for 48% of all user pain" or "these plants experience 3x more disruption after every change to this specific object."

Once you see that, you stop arguing about whether to invest in root-cause work. The data makes it painfully obvious.

Q Many organizations are nervous about AI from a risk, ethics, and data-privacy perspective. How should SAP leaders think about that?

A SAP leaders should be cautious, not scared. The only people who get burned are the ones treating AI casually and tossing sensitive SAP data into whatever tool pops up online. You handle finance, operations, HR, sometimes regulated data, so you cannot improvise. But slowing down is its own risk. If you wait for perfect clarity, your competitors will lap you.

Set basic guardrails. Have real governance. Use the right tool for the right data. Know where your data lives. Make AI decisions traceable. Do those things well and AI reduces risk and exposes issues long before humans can. Do them poorly, or move too timidly, and you do not just fall behind. You fade into irrelevance.

Q How do you separate "AI toys" from serious AI investments inside SAP landscapes?

A At TotalTek, as part of our broader AI advisory approach, we tell clients to start with three brutally simple questions.

One, does this use case materially improve a KPI (Key Performance Indicator) the

business already cares about such as cost, stability, cycle time, user experience, revenue, or risk?

Two, would anyone miss it if we turned it off in 90 days? If the answer is no, it's probably a novelty.

Three, does it integrate into the way people already work, or does it require a separate portal, workflow, or tool that no one has time to visit?

If the business value is vague, the impact of the loss is low, and the workflow sits off to the side, that's an AI toy. It may be interesting, but it won't survive real operations. When AI becomes part of the actual operating rhythm, not a side experiment, that's when it starts paying off.

Q Where does TotalTek fit into all of this? What's your role in the AI + SAP story?

A TotalTek's primary goal is to deliver integrated services that effectively combine SAP solutions, PMO (Project Management Office) practices, and AI. By combining these three domains, we create a force multiplier that strengthens our ability to address complex business challenges.

Instead of trying to be some catch-all AI platform or a typical big systems integrator, we zero in on practical solutions like using AI for predictive maintenance on ships or automating workflows. These AI-enabled solutions make a difference across all our teams, including the Maritime Engineering & Design group.

What sets us apart is how we customize AI for every division's real-world challenges, so our clients see better efficiency and more productivity instead of generic promises. And we never pretend AI alone is the hero. People, process, and platform still matter. Our job is to bring them together in a way that's practical, measurable, and proven in real operations.

Q You lead an AI Innovation Lab. How do you keep that from becoming just a "cool lab" disconnected from SAP reality?

A Discipline is what keeps us grounded. We run the Lab with a simple rule: every idea must tie directly to a real problem we're seeing in SAP projects, SAP support, our PMO delivery work, or even in our Maritime Engineering and Design practice. If we can't point to an actual customer pain point in one of those areas, we don't build it. We're not interested in clever demos that never see daylight. Everything we work on has to matter to someone who's trying to deliver real outcomes.

The other piece is operationalization. Before we build anything, we already know where it will live in the workflow, who will own it, and how we'll measure its impact. If we can't answer those questions upfront, that's a signal the idea isn't ready. We park it.

That's why the Lab works. It's not a tech playground. It's a production engine for AI-enabled solutions that make SAP projects sharper, SAP support more proactive, PMO governance more predictable, and even our engineering teams more efficient.

Q What are the biggest mistakes you see SAP leaders making with AI right now?

A I'm seeing a few consistent traps. The first is starting with the technology instead of the problem. A lot of leaders buy an AI platform and then go hunting for something useful to do with it. That's backward. You have to start with the ugliest problems in your SAP landscape and work your way toward the right tool, not the other way around.

The second mistake is overlooking data readiness. If your ticket data is inconsistent, your change history is sloppy, and your processes aren't documented, AI isn't going to magically fix that. It's just

going to reflect the chaos back to you in cleaner formatting. Leaders underestimate how much data hygiene matters.

And finally, governance. I see a lot of "shadow AI" experiments happening in different pockets of the organization with no common rules around data, risk, or accountability. That creates more cleanup work later than the AI ever saves upfront.

The organizations that get this right move with intention. They're not chasing hype or speed; they're making disciplined, informed decisions that move the SAP environment forward.

Q For an SAP CIO or VP who wants to start, what's a sane first step that doesn't blow up their world?

A Start with one business process and keep the scope tight. Pick something like invoice processing or purchase-order approvals where the steps are clear and the pain points are obvious. Define a couple of outcomes you want to improve—faster cycle times, fewer exceptions, cleaner data—and run a short pilot where AI handles tasks like document classification or anomaly detection.

You'll know quickly whether it works because the process either moves faster or it doesn't. If it shows value, scale it. If not, you've learned without creating chaos. The key is to avoid the giant "AI transformation" trap and start with a focused win you can measure in weeks.

Q Fast-forward three years. What does a mature AI-enabled SAP environment look like to you?

A Three years from now, SAP will feel less like software and more like a business partner that thinks ahead. Issues will be flagged before anyone feels them, and changes won't be gambles because AI will predict their impact with real accuracy. Core processes like invoice handling and purchasing will run with minimal human effort as AI classifies, routes, and validates the work automatically.

Process design itself will change. Instead of teams mapping every step, AI will observe how work flows, suggest improvements, and keep processes updated as the business evolves. Humans will define the intent; the system will handle the details.

Employees will talk to SAP in plain language instead of hunting for transaction codes. Leaders will see system health and risks in real time, not at the end of the month.

A mature AI-driven SAP landscape will be quieter, smarter, and largely self-managed. The business will move faster not because people work harder, but because the system finally pulls its weight.

Q Last question. If you had to summarize your view in one sentence for SAP leaders, what would it be?

A AI is the leverage SAP teams have been missing; it surfaces the truths your dashboards can't, eliminates the waste you've silently accepted, and unleashes a level of impact your people simply couldn't reach without it.

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