ITSM- Garbage in, Garbage out
The Federal Leaders Playbook - Season 1, Episode 10

Featuring:
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Tom Hamill: Welcome. Before we dive in, let's go around and do some introductions.

Eric Lazerson: I'm Eric Lazerson, the Vice President of our service management practice at Acuity.

Kerri Posteraro: Kerri Posteraro, Managing Director at Acuity.

Jessica Alfaro: I am Jessica Alfaro, Senior Manager at Acuity.

Tom Hamill: I'm Tom Hamill, the Senior Technical Manager. We also have a special guest with us today. Brian Shealy with Kinetic Data, Brian you want to do some introductions?

Brian Shealy: Yeah. I'm Brian Shealy, I'm the Global Director of Strategy, Solutions and Sales with Kinetic Data. Do you guys want to talk about garbage in garbage out?
Eric Lazerson: We can certainly talk about garbage in garbage out.
Tom Hamill: We can do garbage in garbage out.
Brian Shealy: I mean it definitely plays into the CMDB thing, right?
Eric Lazerson: I think it plays into the CMDB. You talk a lot about these-these tools all kind of having the same thing Incident Management, you don't want to be the best that Incident Management, although some people think they do right, but their overall goal is not to crush incident management or to crush CMDB, let's be the best. It's-it's do you know [how to] improve the service that you're providing to your end users? When we talk about going through that process and what those tools can capture, I think it-it needs to be talked about, you said process, you know kind of, drives everything. That process and the information that you're actually going to put in that system, it matters. Because if you don't take the time to train your-your user base on what information is relevant, how to input it in the correct space, where to put it in there correctly. These systems are extremely complex. It's easy - and Jessica can tell some stories - it's easy to record information in the wrong place and then that's

missing from your output. So, you may run a report to look at a certain service to see what components make it up but if somebody mis- you know -represented something within that, whether it's you know a networking device that-that's kind of holding it all together, but they recorded it somewhere else, you're going to get incorrect information out. It's tough to rely on those reports if you're not kind of governing the information going in.

Brian Shealy: That speaks to the point that you, we, made at the beginning which is process drives everything. How do you, how do you rediscover on some sort of regularity and reconcile what that discovery is about and then sizing things accordingly, right? If you manage 5,000 CI's in your environment that's a lot different than managing 500,000 CI's and then also what is the governance of that in the process-processes that contribute to the governance of those CI's as well, so...

Kerri Posteraro: I think there is agreement on multiple fronts on the importance of a CMDB but it kind of remains something elusive to most organizations. I think they underestimate the level of effort needed - you don't just set up some automation and walk away. You still to have to think, you still have to look at what's happening and make decisions from it. I think there's a big gap in 'I want this' partially because people around me are saying 'I need it or maybe I do see a lot of value in it but I didn't think it would be so hard, I didn't think it would be so time-consuming; I thought integration with other tools would make this easier' and that's not always the case.

Brian Shealy: Yeah, the, if you guys want to talk about the CMDB for a minute, there's-there's a couple interesting things…

Tom Hamill: Let's do it.

Brian Shealy: Yeah, so I'll share some opinions and kind of, I guess, perspectives on the CMDB. So, like I said Tom and I worked for a provider, an integrator in the space years ago – that's where we met and so 12 years later, at that time you know ITIL coming out and it was ITIL, I think I'm certified in version two and three. You guys are probably version two and three as well. I don't think version one really happened in the United States that I'm aware of.

Eric Lazerson: It was very early.

Brian Shealy: Yeah.

Eric Lazerson: It was very early.

Brian Shealy: Yeah, I don't know that I've ever met anybody that was a version one.

Eric Lazerson: I certainly have.

Brian Shealy: Ok, ok.

Eric Lazerson: That was in my HP days. Yeah, a lot of presence was in the UK so.

Brian Shealy: Ok, so yeah, right, of course as a [fault] leader they're probably reviving that course with that framework.

Eric Lazerson: Yes, yep.

Brian Shealy: So, the whole concept of the CMDB, I think, was apparent in-in version two and in version three even more apparent, right? The idea of good practices and having a repository of data that is your golden record if your records of your landscape through tracking CI's and the relevant attributes and meta data around this, that data. My opinion on it, on the CMDB, is it is like chasing a ghost and-and the reason for it is, especially now, we've moved to a much different landscape, right, just from a service perspective. You know, everybody's got at least one smart device if not multiples. So, the average person who used to have a CI you could track in the form of a desktop or a laptop, now you're tracking some multiple that of things that are touching your network and touching your systems, and, but I think the concept of the CMDB has stayed the same, where it is that golden record. So, what is, what is the, what am I getting at? I'm getting at that, I think that what-what we are going to see is we're going to be a much larger kind of a big data approach to the CMDB, the way that they're logically constructed, the way that federation happens, the way that you can use advanced technologies, you know things are out there, different database types distributed databases using things like Hadoop and big data reconciliation engines. I think that what we're going to see is a new set of tools emerging here soon which will allow the multitude of data…

Eric Lazerson: Interesting

Brian Shealy: …and CI related information to be more accurately passed and faster - closer to real time, and that-that's one of the big things is you know the amount of data is incredible because we're able to track everything, but just thinking about it from the perspective of the CMDB, you know, you have these architectures that are the relational database architectures right and when you get into reconciliation and you have something sniffing across the network and sending data back, we've got latency and bandwidth issues and the-the that had existed forever and you can't just put a fatter pipe, right. That doesn't always work.

Eric Lazerson: Right.

Brian Shealy: It's not, sometimes it's not possible, many times it's way too expensive and then in addition to that, you can't even process the data with the tool sets that you have, so putting a fatter pipe doesn't matter anyway. So, how do you solve this? I think that the technology will change, and I think the idea of chasing that ghost of a CMDB will, in the next

couple of years. I think we're going to see some vendors that will disrupt that and, the other side of it is, if you think about it from the customer perspective I don't think customers care as much about the CI itself. I think they care about the service they're receiving. So, the other thing that, with this whole move to these as a service models with tools themselves, I believe that, so Jess has an Apple device like her an iPhone something or other, or is it an Android I can't tell, it's-it's you have a smartphone.

Eric Lazerson: She has an Android.

Brian Shealy: Great, but if you think about, so-so just talking about that from a service perspective, that's your communication device. It's your communication service that is your means to that. I don't think you actually care about your phone so much as you care about the ability to communicate.

Jessica Alfaro: Yeah absolutely.

Brian Shealy: Text, talk. So, the point of it is-is that I think that we're going to see evolution on two spots. I think we're going to see the models the two models of the CMDB probably change, and you do need a lot of that underlying data, don't get me wrong, but I think that a more modern approach to IT service management should be service focus and less focus on the actual depth of data, like if you treat the service is a holistic thing. So, this is my customer, she has a communication service, it has an issue. Well, how do you fix that issue? We can fix the phone. We can replace the phone. We could do all kinds of different things with that or the issue may just be the network you know, whatever, but I think that we're going to see both a change in the approach to doing the CMDB as a strategy but also the technical side and supporting it. That's what I believe will happen.

Eric Lazerson: And I-I agree with that. I think the CMDB, you call it a ghost, you call it, and we-we've chatted about that in-in-in you know different sessions on the podcast about the CMDB and the difficulty of finding it. What-what I think also, you talk about tracking down to the device level, which putting that in the CMDB just increases that amount of data through the roof that the current tools, I agree, can't keep up with. The reconciliation time, if it takes you a day to reconcile multiple data feeds that-that information is out of date and irrelevant. So, what a lot of organizations have done is just kind of kept it at 'let's look at just kind of that data center aspect of everything' [the com]. So, not to the device level but as soon as that device communicates with the network, I can track it from there. I think that's something they can do and should be doing today, but I agree there needs to be some disruption to handle all of this information, to make that data available in a kind of a single

view whether it's a federated you know source, it doesn't matter but it needs to be in that view but then usable information is consumable through the rest of your tool set.

Tom Hamill: I mean, does to go back to where you have to kind of take stock on the tools you have and will they fit the future, and are we are back to consistently buying new tools to keep up with the technology, and do you see some of these vendors trying to gear themselves towards the future so they can take an [all estate A] they can do reconciliation without failing and?

Brian Shealy: Yeah that's a good question. I don't know that I'm the right person to answer that because you know, we see, the way that it did it works in my world is-is we you know we're specifically focused on providing typically a customer experience.

Tom Hamill: Right.

Brian Shealy: So, I was working with a customer today in Europe and they have a need to streamline the way that, not their end customers are doing things, what they need is they need to a way to streamline the intake of service request and calls and things like that to a call center. So, the customer of our tool set would actually be a call center agent, right? And you could ask, 'why couldn't you use an ITSM tool for that?' Well, it's not all IT services they're providing and what that customer service person is actually doing is they're working within five tools, they're working within a CRM system, an ITSM system, a bunch of custom stuff, custom business applications and then they're also working, they have to you know look up billing data for you know the customer. So, we kind of touch the backends like we were meeting and having that kind of a conversation. We're talking more about you know can we integrate and how do we achieve that integration level? So, I don't really know what people are doing these days in terms of you know which vendors doing XYZ and.

Tom Hamill: Yeah.

Brian Shealy: [Specifically] I don't really know.

Tom Hamill: Yeah.

Jessica Alfaro: But it's interesting you're, I guess the perspective that you're bringing is that I-I think there is a gap in what current tools provide from a CMDB perspective. There's definitely room for improvement and I think maybe that goes back to what we were talking about earlier in one of our previous sessions, where we were saying that it's, CMDB is one of those things that it's difficult to gain customer adoption.

Eric Lazerson: Right.

Jessica Alfaro: And, or you know what you just said, it's a ghost right? So, they're trying to chase this thing and they are they're not able to realize the true value of it so the I guess the

output of that I think is another part of-of you know what the visualization of what all that information looks like, like what is the right level to show end users, to show Senior Management. There's so much data that you're putting into this thing and having that visualization of what it is that you're looking at, that is a gap. I don't see tools doing that very well.

Brian Shealy: And-and you [were talking about] in terms of the IT service management space?

Jessica Alfaro: Right.

Brian Shealy: I would, I would agree with you from-from my perspective, but I think one very interesting thing is you know we're, as human beings, I believe that we're driven by what we do in our everyday life and I think that's one of the things that drives behaviors within business tool sets, so your point being that you can't visualize what's going on right, it's kind of high-level. If you think about it from your everyday life, I'll bet you feel that you have a much better perspective for example and you are banking which you know these days banking is, well everybody's using credit cards. There's a lot of data transacting across banking. So, you can go into your banking system as a customer of the banking system and see where did you spend money and look at reports and the visualization of things and you're saying to me that-that you can't do that in…

Jessica Alfaro: In CMDB.

Brian Shealy: Yeah, yeah. Around

Jessica Alfaro: So, from that perspective just because we are you know focusing on the CMDB.

Brian Shealy: Yeah, but I, I believe what's going to happen is people are going to realize very soon, and I'm sure there's vendors doing it, but I think it's going to become more apparent especially in this space where people are going to go, "Well I can do this in my banking, why can't I do this?" and the vendor's going to go, "Well we can and we enable it", and-and I think that in the next, I don't know, 18 months or something we'll see probably more of that type of visualization. So, I think it's important you know having a context of what's going on, not just the data of what's going on. You have to be able to contextualize it with visualization and other things.

Jessica Alfaro: Right.

Tom Hamill: Yes, it's a, in a way that's a challenge in the federal space –keeping up with what's happening outside. So, you say, the banking, I can go in the bank and then pull up a

report and visualize where I'm spending that money, you know, restaurant, out on Amazon, what have you.

Brian Shealy: That's a great point.

Tom Hamill: The government, being a little bit behind may not have those tools to bring up the visualization or…

Kerri Posteraro: Right, your bank is giving you that personal experience in a technical environment especially when you're scanning the network for information, what you're pulling back isn't just my personal information, it's everybody in this room, in this building, in this county, in this right, and its overload, so when I don't approach that kind of data collection with a, with a point and I just take whatever I can get, I kind of get lost and stuck in that volume of information back and I'm not sure what to do with it.

Tom Hamill: Yeah.

Brian Shealy: There's a lot of data out there.

Eric Lazerson: There's a lot of data.

Jessica Alfaro: Yeah, so I think just hearing the conversation, it sounds like the tool is usually not the issue, it's the process, it's the communication, it's the governance around it. We're not in the business of being the best at Incident Management. We want to be the best at service delivery and enabling service delivery.

Eric Lazerson: We have talked in other podcasts about our, Acuity's approach to kind of the assessment conversation, the tools, analysis, identifying the gaps. We all are partners, you know with multiple service management vendors and recognize that each one of them have strengths that could be beneficial for certain customers. So, I think it's a case-by-case you know, you have to really get to know that customer. How much have they invested in their current tool set? Do they have multiple tools doing duplicative things and is there an opportunity for consolidation? And I think that's, you know, one of those kind of initial conversations, you can have is, just ask, we've got about 10 questions we'll ask you, and depending you know it's kind, of spits out an-obvious, it's usually an obvious answer; and I would say most of the time the answer is to stick with what you got. Let's improve your process, let's get out there and communicate the fact that you have this tool, you've made this investment. You, we find that the functionality usage in these big enterprise tools is you know 10-15% of the total functionality available. So, you're missing out on lots of opportunities to automate, lots of opportunities to do some pretty cool things. We talked about visualization. Some of these tools have it, you just need to get the information in the right space, you got to you got to ask some experts on the on the tool, how to really leverage

that. So, I would say it's, you know, it's pretty-pretty straightforward but not everybody's willing to have that conversation. They've been through some rough times with their existing tools and they're looking at that shiny object and saying, "Hey, that'll solve my problems or maybe that'll get my boss off me for a few years." I don't know.

Jessica Alfaro: Yeah. I think it comes back to process drives everything.

Brian Shealy: Process drives everything.

Jessica Alfaro: Because it really does. I guess swapping out the technology and not changing behavior you're going to continue to get the same results.

Brian Shealy: So-so, I have one last question for you guys. So, when I started in in this business and I think I think you guys would probably agree that 12 years ago or 15 years ago there was this concept in Enterprise IT shops of having a single vendor, right, a singer single throat to choke if you will. I came from the sales side so, often I was the throat to grab, but what are your feelings today on bringing best of breed solutions and architecting for key functionality in certain areas versus sticking with a single vendor? What do you guys think about that?

Tom Hamill: We touched on that in an earlier podcast but I think we feel like it's going towards that best of breed, whether looking at a tool for certain piece of it that does it really well, it may have the capability do another process or another piece but they may bring in another tool for that. So, I think we're seeing that more and more. Yeah.

Brian Shealy: Is it, are you saying it is like ancillary value or added value? So they have I don't know, we'll call it a ITSM system and they want to do better, something like notifications for outages and things like that and they'll bring in a tool set specific to that because it can plug in and integrate - is that the kind of thing you're saying like, like that's a key part of the work they deliver and they have to have that right, so rather than a whole new system they're just going to get one system that does the notification, or that sort of thing? Is that what you're saying?

Eric Lazerson: I-I would say we're seeing a combination of things. We see as we-we kind of analyze these tools, we see people uncovering functionality they didn't know existed and then they're like 'well let's try and make this work' and then they realize that that vendor didn't really spend a whole lot of time building out that functionality so it's limited. That then drives them to go look for something best of breed in that, in that space, because now you have a justification for ok we-we have a software application here, it does you know it does this really well, when it gets into this space it's kind of limited, kind of weak. So, I see that as somewhere where we start to go off and do you know that best of breed analysis and bringing

in other tools but yeah it's-it's challenging because in the same sentence you-you hear what the software vendors are doing and-and I've seen players not in the ITSM space, let's say they're in the system monitoring space, and they'll sell a big enterprise system monitoring tool and then say hey by the way government buyer we also have an ITSM application that just bolts on and we'll give that to you for free.

Brian Shealy: Right.

Eric Lazerson: Unfortunately, folks kind of fall for that. They're looking for the best value but a lot of times the level of effort to get that application to do what some of those best-of-breed applications do will far exceed the amount of money you would spend on bringing in best of breed.

Tom Hamill: Brian, thank you so much for coming in.

Brian Shealy: Well thanks for having me. I enjoyed to talk to my friends at Acuity.

Tom Hamill: I really enjoyed it.

Eric Lazerson: Yeah thanks Brian.

Tom Hamill: Come back.

Brian Shealy: Thanks.