Do we really need all these ITSM tools?
"Commoditization of Service Management Tools"
The Federal Leaders Playbook - Season 1, Episode 7

Featuring:
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Brian Shealey – Global Director of Strategy, Solutions, and Sales with Kinetic Data

Tom Hamill: Ok, welcome. Today's subject will be "The Commoditization of Service Management Tools". Before we dive in, let's go around and do some introductions. I'm Tom Hamill, the Senior Technical Manager.

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: Ok, we also have a special guest with us today. Brian Shealey with Kinetic Data, Brian you want to do some introductions?

Brian Shealey: Yeah. I'm Brian Shealey, I'm the Global Director of Strategy, Solutions and Sales with Kinetic Data. We're a software company out of St. Paul, Minnesota. We work in, what I like to call, 'self-service driven automation space.'

Tom Hamill: Awesome. Along with this subject we have a certain tag line. Eric, do you want to go ahead and say it?

Eric Lazerson: Sure. I've been around service management tools for a long time. I've taken some time to study on the process side as well and I ran across this quote many years ago, I think we all kind of have seen it and laughed at it but it's-it's "a fool with a tool is still a fool". Brian, have you heard that?

Brian Shealey: I have.

Eric Lazerson: How's that make you feel?

Brian Shealey: I, yeah. It's a, well, you could say a tool with a tool is still a tool. That would be slightly derogatory, I think. Where do you think that comes from?

Eric Lazerson: I think it comes from the concept of placing a technology; a new piece of technology into an environment is going to solve your problems.

Brian Shealey: Yeah, I would agree with you. I think that that comes from the especially in the government landscape, government IT landscape where much of it is outsourced and

these contracts change where we're going to solve the program problems of delivery by-by putting a new bid out or bringing a new provider or providers say we're going to bring in XYZ as a new tool. And for whatever the capability would be, the idea often that is sold, or bought, is the tool is going to solve the problems and that is not a holistic approach to service management, and it's not very forward-thinking for anybody that has any real experience at actually delivering real value and you'll find very quickly that as you said a fool with a tool is still a fool.

Eric Lazerson: Is still a fool. Yeah, I think the other kind of cliché that you mentioned is the new shiny tool that you mentioned that'll solve everything right. So, service management is difficult and it's time-consuming to actually get it implemented at an organizational level and we're so often, and I'll throw myself in this pocket, is I get easily distracted. Right so, to pay attention to something for long periods of time, sometimes a year, two years for some of these full maturity realizations along that path a shiny object will, will be out there.

Brian Shealey: Yeah, I refer to it as 'throwing the ball into the room full of kittens.' So you know, I work for a software company, where we will see, we do demonstrations of our technology and a lot of what we do is around the integration space and, as a result, we have to talk about different technologies, and if you have a large room full of people, everybody's got a different agenda and often times one key point will come out and you can just see it, it's like kittens batting around, you know, the shiny thing and the entire purpose of what is the purpose of the IT Service Management tool is to better deliver service which is the business of the agency or Department in the first place. So, for example, the Food and Drug Administration, their mission is not to be an IT provider; it is to administer or administrate policy around Food and Drug safety generally, right? So, I think that the whole idea of the tool that's one of the three pillars of what holds this all together but it obviously is people processing technology. And I think to one of the key points that we've talked about in the past is process drives everything and I think you need to have a holistic approach to understanding what's the end goal of the process. So, is it to provide a very cool front end for something that there's no substance behind, or is it to fix the foundation of what you're doing as an IT organization? I think that's the underlying point of what you're trying to do.

Eric Lazerson: I would agree and I think that gets back to kind of the-the title of the session – the commoditization tools you just talked about - and I think you're the perfect guest to kind of grasp this because, while your technology could certainly do a lot of the service management, capturing of data and facilitating of a process, you kind of sit in a unique position where you look at these different providers of service management tools and each one of them has their niche where they're a little stronger in some areas and weaker in others but across the board when it comes to the basic incident problem change and CMDB processes that we want to automate, they're pretty similar.

Brian Shealey: I would, I would agree. I think that generally most of you know, and I've been in the space for, I'll call it 12 years, actually, Tom and I worked together.

Tom Hamill: Yeah, way back.

Brian Shealey: Yeah and like when I got into the space, it was kind of when ITIL, you know, was coming out.

Eric Lazerson: Right.

Brian Shealey: And, interestingly enough, you know, policy changes and best practice frameworks come into industries, and the industries evolve, and that's obviously what's happened over the last ten years, fifteen years maybe. Especially in the government space but one of the things that I've learned along the way is if you don't have a good foundation, an understanding you know it comes down to, IT to me is about delivering technology truly as a service, because you are providing a service typically to either other companies for profit or other groups within your agency for fee-for-service or non-fee-for-service and I think at the end of it, really it comes down to service management managing the issues and delivering the service is about how do we please the customer, ensure they have what they need to do whatever their business function is, but an incident is an incident, a change is a change, and at the end of the day you know getting a new tool set because you don't like the way Incident Management is running your tool probably has a lot less to do with the tool and more to do with your entire approach to incident management.

Tom Hamill: Yeah and I think that leads to some things that we see out there where if they understand their process and procedures they might find the current tool that they have can do the job right.

Brian Shealey: Yes.

Tom Hamill: Not jumping into a new t-, a new tool but in understanding what you have and can that do the job without buying a new one, going through upgrades and such, so?

Brian Shealey: Yeah, I would agree, and-and you know just one point there is, our company, we're very, sort of, specific, in what we do and ~~that specificity is around~~ there's two major places that we play and-and I'll say these very generically. One is user experience, so creating user interfaces and customer experience and the customer could be anybody. It could be, Tom and I need to trade some sort of information or file and he's requesting it from me and I'm giving it to him, so that could be a-an example of a customer relationship where I am the provider to him; he's my customer and that's just really a mind-set but more importantly so that whole user and customer experience layer is one and the other area is integration. An-and we have specifically designed what we do around those capabilities. Most of the service management tools, in my opinion, are very good systems of record for managing your ability to report on incidents, changes, etc.… and so forth, but at the enterprise level specifically in the large agency, large departments based in the federal government, I really believe that much of it is around delivering the infrastructure and the applications of course -the actual technology – so you need a very good approach to having a CMDB. You need to build a structure that gives you that record of what you, what your assets are and then what the life cycle with those assets would be and most of the tools have that stuff.

Eric Lazerson: Right

Brian Shealey: And I think you know and we've obviously worked on projects together and I think one of the things that-that happens is there's a lot of money to be made in chaos, right, and so when, and this is obviously an opinion of mine having because we work with quite frankly any of the ITSM platforms, it doesn't matter what flavor it is, whether it's vanilla, chocolate, orange sherbet, it's all the same to us, in that we think of those systems as specialized in what they do just like on the CRM side we work with those tools as well. So, from our perspective you know they're all kind of doing very similar functions but again that's the technology piece of the service management, it's around designing your process for what you do and there's the and having good people and having a good partnership with your provider. So, on projects that I've worked with and you know I'll plug Acuity for a second I mean you guys have a very good approach to you know, I'm a software guy, I want to come in and sell software.

Eric Lazerson: Right.

Brian Shealey: Right that's what drives us but I think one of the things we found is, working with Acuity, you do, you guys approach the customer need and that is the paramount thing that you're driving to and I think that practice, if everybody were to-to do that from the contracting officer at the agency [out] and understand that, what is our goal of this project? It's not to be good at incident management. It's not to have a great CMDB. It's to better be the FDA or better be whatever agency you would be, I think and that again goes back to the point of you know it is a bit of a commodity and in many ways.

Eric Lazerson: Sure.

Brian Shealey: There are certainly depths of the tool sets and, but I think you know your goal is here – let's just call it to become a great provider of infrastructure services for XYZ agency, XYZ department and if that's your goal that goal should be wrapped in timelines and expectations should be set and your tools - ITSM tools or provisioning tools - whatever you're using should support what those goals are, you know and provide the relevant value. If you're buying something that allows you to go to the moon and you only want to go to Baltimore you don't really need it, you know?

Eric Lazerson: A good plug for Baltimore

 Brian Shealey: It is. Baltimore's worth going to, probably more accessible than the moon anyways, but, yeah. So, I think it's important that you have a good approach holistically.