Digital Podcast Show Notes

Episode 17.5 with guest Ken Gonzales

**Hosts: Barclay Rae, Ian Aitchison,**

**Guest:** Ken Gonzales

BR: Welcome. This week is special. Talking about issues of the day. No idle banter from Ian, instead let’s welcome Ken Gonzalez! Practitioner and Analyst. Not speaking today in his role as Industry Analyst at Gartner today, but as an independent voice.

**Ken, what’s your background?**

KG: Been working in Service Management for - wow - around 35 years. For last 5 years, been working at Gartner. **I am not speaking as a Gartner Representative today.** Keen fan of the value of community and contribution in the industry.

BR: **You’ve also been a pilot and a musician?**

KG: I’ve done many things in my career and I don't apologise for them, I celebrate them. They inform my take on things and help me relate to people in many ways. I talk a lot about many different areas, both personally or professionally. I have a chequered multifaceted past.

IA: [makes a joke]

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BR: We want to start talking about a new Incident Model recently published by IT Revolution. What is that? Let’s talk about this. I blogged about this <https://www.barclayrae.com/the-times-are-a-changing-arent-they-always/>

**What’s your take Ken?**

KG: On the whole this is a valuable contribution to the industry. I’d give it a solid 7. ITIL previously on incident management has been a 2. [Surprisingly, no joke there about a solid number two]

BR: **Is this about major incident?**

KG: Yes, major incident management. This is what the document is focussing on. This is clearly a step above and about targeting a well coordinated reaction to what is probably a major incident.

BR: This does seem to be a very technical software oriented response. **What do you think is missing?**

KG: from a framework approach it does a fairly good job of saying ‘this is the big picture’. The incident response pattern cycle is a 3-stepper, but there are two key things missing though:

1 - preparedness and mitigation: Being able to do risk analysis and business impact assessment is a key portion of that cycle. If you don't do that well, your response activities may not be up to the task. So the response methodology needs to be sufficiently generic to enable us to play.

2 : exercise management strategy: exercises are a good thing because they let you pressure test a plan. We want to be able to execute the responsibilities. How do we act as members of an incident management team. We need to have trained as a team. At some point we will find that the preparation is insufficient. Thats ok. You want to find that upfront. Thats part of a larger loop that goes into continuous improvement.

And I'd say there is a 3rd thing - it does not go deep enough ito continuous improvement. This is a good starting point. But its not going to get us all the way there.

IA: It does say that incidents are a great opportunity to learn. **That’s still a feed into continuous improvement isn't it?**

KG: Your core responsibility is to resolve the issue. Learning comes next. Blameless post incident reviews are important. Response teams do get better every time they go through a disciplined cycle of action. ‘Where can we do better’? We should be looking both at how we organise our programmatic response. Without that we’re missing an important element.

BR: I can't help thinking that what is missing is the human element. The person that is doing the job and is waiting. Human factors and emotional state. Good SM people can see things in context and understand the big picture, not only technical facts.

IA: And what about empathy? Having a human connection is important. **Do you still get that with this?**

BR: I deal with orgs that do incident management on an industrial scale. **Can they see an incident as an opportunity or do they just get on with it and get people back working?**

KG: the default is ‘let's just deal with it’ ‘im already overloaded’. The scaling factor is important. I have experience running ‘real’ incidents (aircraft, disaster etc). **I refer to the incident command system and the national incident management system. ICS and NIMS.**

If there is one thing I dislike about this new Incident Model is that it is too technical. Using ICS and NIMS give us the foundation for scalability.

Example: There’s a fire. A police officer sees it. They are the incident commander. Then they call in the fire department and the chief there takes over as the commander; there is a handover and the response team grows. Now it gets worse, there is a handover to the battalion chief, the response is growing, the risk to the community is growing. But something that starts as a major incident may not stay as one. It may become a business continuity issue very quickly.

The document says ‘we must resolve quickly’. Actually, security people would not agree, you don't rush in and wipe a server. You have to consider the needs of the security of team and be cautious in the right response.

BR: Thinking about how we manage risk seems to be missing.

You mentioned that it is quite technical. **Surely it’s not easy for this to be transposed beyond IT?**

KG: I agree. It’s a good solid 7, there’s a lot of great principles. If this provides the bridge out of IT, we should embrace that but look at what the rest of the world if doing beyond IT and bring that back in. Service management predates ITSM by a number of years. We are suffering the effects of tightly coupling service management to the domain of IT. This is a topic that I and others have been talking about for a long time.

IA: that's the foundation of this podcast - the decoupling of SM from ITSM.

BR: where does this fit with SRE? Site reliability engineering is moving in this direction, **Do these things sit together?**

KG: I think SRE is a great thing but it is not exclusive to devops or to SRE. The major incident topic transcends it.if we place too much emphasis on the SR engineering then that ends up being problematic.

BR: some content refers to criticisms such as ‘blame culture’ and ‘incident management is not about problems that are assigned blame and root causes’ not everything is assigned blame. So let's look at how this been framed and how its been introduced. This has come out of the devops movement but it hasn't involved those on the edge of the itsm world that could add some colour. What's your take? **The end user world want to see us all working together surely?**

KG: i would like people to include ICS and NIMS as something to expand the world view. Those larger contexts… something that happens in the public domain… multiple agencies working towards a common objective. With that as a background there is no reason why a particular framework should say this is limited to particular roles. We need everybody engaged in a meaningful way and contributing all the special skills and knowledge that they have got to do to achieve the objective.

This is the thing that should be guiding us. That is the enterprise take..

What we are in together. It no longer exists to only do IT things. We exist to help the organization get done what it needs to get done?

BR: **Is incident management really broken. did it need this?**

KG: yes. We could talk about this for hours. IT groups function as ‘we’re all about our things and stuff. Software we write or things we maintain. Its predictable. I can look in a manual. I am successful based on how much I know and can bring to bear.

But where it meets people is the biggest gap and set of vulnerabilities. People are panicky and prickly and can be overly demanding. Not as clear as dealing with a router. As soon as you get someone cross, that's where we lose the plot. If dealing with a true multi discipline incident you need to bring people together from different backgrounds and get your focus from what you bring together. That is the opportunity to upgrade your capability from reactive to one that is proactive.

BR: Let’s look at the other big story of the day. The sale of Axelos to Peoplecert. ITIL, Prince and many more. Peoplecert have been the sole provider of certification products licensed to ATOs for many years. The cost is significant and there is pressure for the whole product range to be expanded. There’s the traditional world ramping up and knowing it has to expand, and then there are new Incident models coming in. **What’s your take on this?**

KG: Anything that is investing and sharing knowledge is generally a good thing. But you have to ask yourself ‘how relevant is this to what the market needs to do a job job for my customer’. I just rebooted my blog <https://www.kennethgonzalez.com>. Way back I wrote a blog post about this. When a body of knowledge starts it gets uptick with practitioners, community and ATOs and exam institutes and vendors. This is all a good thing. It shows there is value here. But it places a unique constraint - as soon as you start investing in it, and making it a thing, people are dependent on it and say ‘dont change it too much, don't move the cheese too far’.

So, yes we want to grow and evolve, but yes we want to leverage investments. If it is not managed properly it could be seen as a cash grab, as opposed to looking at what is the fit that people need to drive the right outcomes with their customers. If the latter is what results then I’m all for it.

BR: I agree. It is challenging - there’s a lot in the industry that don’t like it for probably good reasons. The lack of separation between the authoring and the certification business. Most people don't care about that though. Most people want it to be good and to work well, so it's probably a good thing. The important positive thing is that it will be marketed and headspace will be single and clear and global. Axelos did what it can but hasnt really been driven by Capita. Peoplecert isn't a huge organization but is becoming bigger and should be able to invest in the messaging and the marketing.

There are other models of course, not just ITIL, some are commercial and some are open source. But if we look at expanding the audience, it's got to be positive.

KG: If we look at the number of different organizations that exist targeting different roles and specific needs - for example devops enterprise. There are a lot of commercial vendors, any number of schemes and badges. All these things divide people's attention. We need to look at what is relevant to them. Something that is ‘beneficial to my career’ vs ‘beneficial to my customer’. Where am I going to invest? With the multitude of options out there, how can we expect that to pan out. People already invested in ITIL are predisposed to double down on this. With all of the different players out there, its less certain that it will be successful.

BR: It’s a lot of money. One more point - there is a great opportunity to develop SM education for people earlier in their careers - for the school and college. **Do you think peoplecert need to look at that?**

KG: Absolutely, the core connection is between SM and product management. If we can start with how we connect these with broader principles we can be more successful.

IA: If more comes in to younger people in education. Maybe this isnt IT training, this is service management training for careers that are not IT?

KG: absolutely. We don't want the next generation to suffer the same way we did.

BR: [shows arrows in his back]

**Endbit**

Ken’s recommended drink.

**Beer.** “I love beer” Stouts and Porters.

I’m a fan of a good Belgian. I like **Monkless Belgian Beers : The FNG**

**Key Lessons from Ken Gonzalez**

1 - SM is more than IT

2 - Major Incident mgmt needs more **ICS and NIMS.**

3 - The ITrevolution New Incident Model is a ‘solid 7’, but not perfect.

4 - People are panicky and prickly and can be overly demanding

5- If dealing with a true multi discipline incident you need to bring people together from different backgrounds and get your focus from what you bring together.

**Useful Links**

Ken’s Blog: <https://www.kennethgonzalez.com>

Ken on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/ken_gonzalez>

Ken on linked in: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/kengon/>

That ITRevolution document on Incident Management: <https://itrevolution.com/new-framework-for-incident-management/>