Digital Podcast Show Notes

Episode 51 with Guest Rob Akershoek

Hosts: Barclay Rae, Ian Aitchison

Greetings section

BR: Greetings!

IA: Today's trivia. Recommended alternative podcast: lexman.rocks - an AI produced series of podcasts. A machine podcasting with a machine.

BR: Today's guest is Rob Akershoek, who are you Rob?

RA: IT management architect, looking at digital journeys and delivery models. Background business and IT, evolved through IT management, risk, and then into agile working, and more into linking all parts together.

IA: A master of The Big Picture?

RA: yes. Many organisations are working blind, with their own separate frameworks and practices that are disconnected.

Main Bit

BR: Let's talk about complexity. From an organisation point of view, how do they start to understand how work goes across all parts and makes things better?

RA: To start, they often have ambitions about being more digital, agile, moving the cloud, But they find that they may be stuck and unable to transform in one big go. So I start with asking what is your current state, are your processes, what is your tooling landscape - they may have 50-100 tools, unintegrated, to manage IT. I show them all the initiatives underway - there are always a lot - I show all these parts and let them understand how they must fit together and create a bigger picture. I ask do you understand your product or service portfolio? How do we link them all together.

IA: Step back. Before starting this journey, do you have a way to explain to a client all the measurable benefits they would get from making these big and complex changes to bring everything together?

RA: Good point, some companies have vision and know where they are trying to get from the start. Some organisations cant see that and look for a business case first. The difference between 'will this create value' and 'what value we miss if we don't do this'.

IA: Its different for every organisation - do you share examples and success stories of the benefit from these changes?

RA: It's possible, but all these stories you see and hear are also very much positive marketing. Companies don't want to talk about their failures.

BR: At conferences with a lens on one area, all the stories are in one small area.

RA That's right, I try to show the bigger picture, how all those different areas connect to together. Silo'd initiatives are more likely to fail. It is very challenging to improve end to end processes.

BR: Talking about huge organisations like Shell, the challenge is 'how do we move this forward'. Is it harder for larger?

RA: Mid sized organisations also have challenges, they all need to think about how do we manage a portfolio of services and products. What is my business model and value streams.

To reduce costs and deliver more we still have to look at how all parts (demands, epic, incidents, changes) - they all should link to the business model.

IA: You mentioned something earlier - Make Work Visible. That's interesting, visibility is a key outcome from this, right?

RA: Yes, I often ask an organisation where is your work managed? - we look at backlogs and epics and stories and features, and queues and requests and outsourced activities, compliance and housekeeping. They are always surprised by how much because it was not visible before. We start with Where is Work Managed today? That leads to 'what are people doing in IT?' and 'what happens to deliver X'?

BR: What would you say to organisations that are still silo'd - what to get teams tow work together more.

RA: We usually identify two main work engines - a development engine (like Jira) and a service engine (like ServiceNow). Then we look to make the flow in each engine visible from each engine. We link things, improve the cmdb, we take a business area - such as HR - and focus on that. This often leads to understanding why the monitoring is not working, or why the cmdb is wrong.

IA: I see that Product Management connection again, for PMs the centre is a Product Management tool (such as Aha), but it has relationships into these two areas.

RA: Yes its the same thing, linking things together.

IA: I'll say again, Service Management = Product Management.

RA: Yes, orgs implement Portfolio Management, and move from Project to Epic, but miss out Products in the middle.

BR: This concept of finding work, Is there a clear message we can start with on this?

RA: Think about value streams. Big demands and initiatives coming in. Small Enhancements to existing services, Requests to do something new (catalogue), Issue/Question/Incidents. Focus on those four areas and how to improve each one.

BR: the four big value streams in IT4IT?

RA: Yes. They help you structure your understanding and improvement approach.

IA: Every part of that is 100% applicable to SaaS ISV Vendor products too.,

BR: In a non-IT environment this is important to communicate in simple terms, and avoid 'ITIL processes'.

RA: Yes

BR: Who do we talk to in organisations that can understand this inside IT and outside of IT?

RA: You need a person that understands value streams end to end. Value Stream Analyst. Needs a mix of business and IT understanding. What do we need to improve and what is the impact and how do they fit together?

BR: thanks Rob!

Rob's Recommended Podcast Bar Drink
- Location counts more than the drink. I would have a cold Amstel beer, on an island in greece.

Useful Links

- Rob on LinkedIn: https://www.linkedin.com/in/robakershoek/
- Rob on Twitter https://twitter.com/robakershoek

Bar Bio

- Rob sees the big picture and the interconnectedness of all things. (That reminds me of the Douglas Adams book 'Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective Agency', which is not his best work IMO). Anyway, if you are looking for an operating model advisor, an IT4IT architect, a good discussion about agile and value streams, or a public speaker, Rob is your man. You'll find him - ideally - on a greek island, enjoying an ice cold beer, or on one of the links here. Great podcast Rob, thanks for guesting with us!