Digital Podcast Show Notes Episode 52 with guest Sandra Whittleston

Hosts: Barclay Rae, Ian Aitchison
(disclaimer: Show notes are approximations of topics discussed, not word for word exact quotations).

Greetings section
BR: Greetings!
IA: Today's trivia. Scientists have managed to animate a dead spider to act as a zombie spider robot and pick things up. What a wonderful world we live in!
BR: Today's guest is Sandra Whittleston. Who are you Sandra?
SW: Worked in higher education much of my career, also in Building Society and a newspaper, and local authorities. All led towards high education and the need to teach IT Service Management in Universities. Now semi-retired and working at the Open University.
BR: Welcome!

Main Bit
BR: Why is more education about Service Management important? What's the value of doing this?
SW: Computing undergraduates can be in for a shock when they hear about IT Service Management if they have not been involved in it before. There is a huge benefit to ITSM for students, some have got jobs specifically because they were taught ITSM. Without teaching ITSM, they approach industry and careers without an understanding of how IT business works (in Service Management). We need to be more purposeful about this.
IA: Is there a path for a non-computing student to go into ITSM career?
SW: Yes, I have taught this to both computing and business students. When talking to computing academics they say 'ITSM is soft skills' and business people say 'ITSM is computing and technical'. There is a third way.
We have to get back to the drawing board and find a way to push this forward and think about how to build IT service professionals from the beginning of their higher education. Same as we teach -for example - nurses.
We need to build connections early to external networks and become part of an industry system that helps them along their career path.
BR: What do people learn in computing degrees these days? Is it just academic and theoretical? I remember some graduates in the past that came out with a computing degrees that gave them nothing helpful relevant to a job in industry.
SW: We have a huge arsenal of techniques in education and there are learning paths to help people, There is academic knowledge, understanding of the topic, also cognitive skills - challenges, practical skills, tradeoffs and evaluations- and professional skills around policy and governance. Students can learn all this and key skills and understanding of themselves. Education is often heavily driven by assessment, but these other skills have to be included in these course, and service management should be right in the centre of all that.

BR: Does that mean we should have a more general definitions, with modules like platform, programming and service management included? There are some degree courses that teach you how to do a job, and some are academic and teach you knowledge and understanding only.

IA: Yes, if you study History, you are unlikely to be a career Historian. But vocational - such as nursing and health - you have vocations skills to start in that industry. Isn't IT Service Management vocational in that way?

SW:Yes ITSM should be seen as part of vocational path.

BR: Should the ITSM certification content be better taught to people aged 18-13 instead of 35/30+?

SW: Current training needs to become more like CPD (continual professional development) a natural evolution where a degree supports professional development.

IA: Do people with ITSM learnt in higher education go straight into higher Management starting positions?

SW: Not necessarily. It depends on your skills set and what they can demonstrate, and then other options open up. So other experiences can help define where they start.

BR: On the post-graduate training side of things (ITIL etc) - should all be common sense really, how to write and how to present and how to communicate and analyse etc.

SW: We do our best to ensure that students are literate and skilled in relevant communication, but you are right that there are general skills, not always easy to address those.

BR: What about virtual learning? Is that viable for higher education?

sW: Well, online learning is very popular, and the pandemic has shown that it can work. Ideally I would have a series of upfront learning, followed by presentation-back and talking about something they have studied, and also going out and talking to industry people.
I do work in the Open University which is a virtual university.

SW: Of course post pandemic there is a lot of shifting going on. You can do remote learning and you still need face to face.

BR: I know that the industry bodies around ITSM certification have struggled to connect in with higher education…

SW: Education has to deliver what industry wants. They should all get in a room together and thrash out a new way. I and others have proven that it can be done, the will is there, we can put these things together if we can all have an open mind.

Sandra's Recommended Podcast Bar Drink
- A half pint of golden ale.

Useful Links
- Sandra on LinkedIn: https://www.linkedin.com/in/sandrawhittleston
- Sandra on Twitter https://twitter.com/swhittleston

Bar Bio
- Sandra is passionate about education! She is on a mission to bring service management into higher (degree) education in the UK, and probably, given the opportunity, the rest of the world, and beyond. As her twitter bio says - education sets you free. Well, we certainly did learn a lot from our podcast with Sandra, so we are all freer than we were before! Thanks Sanda, now you can go and enjoy a well deserved golden Ale!