

ConnectALL – Enabling Software Development Companies to Remove Waste and Become More Predictable with Their Value Stream Solution



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Interview conducted by:
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CEOCFO Magazine

CEOCFO: *Mr. Knight, one of the first things I see on the ConnectALL, LLC site is "Value Stream Management for the Enterprise." What are you offering?*

Mr. Knight: We offer a value stream management solution for the enterprise, so that they are able to feed, measure and automate their software delivery value streams. Essentially, this allows them to find and remove waste and become more predictable in how they deliver and develop software to their customers.

CEOCFO: *What are some of the challenges for any organization in evaluating the software they are using, just piece by piece, or in totality?*

Mr. Knight: That is an interesting thing. Today, organizations still have the silos and disparate systems that they are using to develop software. The challenge for most CIOs or CTOs today is actually having visibility into those systems. By visibility, I mean truly understanding how far along I am with an initiative, how much budget have I spent, how well is my team performing because they are silent in these systems. That is a big challenge, because how do you be predictable if you do not have any visibility.

How do you really estimate how long an initiative is going to take if you have no visibility and you cannot see into the systems? You do not know what your throughputs are and you cannot make business decisions to time the market on your software assets and things you need to be more effective if you have no predictability or business orders.

CEOCFO: *How does ConnectALL work? What are you doing that provides a result that tells people where they are right now?*

Mr. Knight: Because ConnectALL is an automation platform, we have access to all of those systems through their APIs. That allows us to harvest data from each one of those systems, and provide a set of predictable analytics, that people actually now have visibility into things that they have never had visibility before, real time at the moment as work is happening in your environment. At the same time, once you understand that visibility, you can use our automation platform to integrate those systems and improve flow, to become predictable and become more agile in your delivery.

CEOCFO: Do you initially need to know what your customer wants to find out? Are there all kinds of configurations or things that are overlapping?

Mr. Knight: When you think about software development, there are tons of systems. They have Jira or Rally or Digital AI or Service Now, and everyone in their different silos are working in these different systems for their different teams. They may have a team using Rally development software, a team using Jira, but everything comes from Salesforce. We have to hold, what we call a VSM assessment, to know where all the data is and how we can get to it, how we can improve flow by having user storage go from Rally to Jira, back and forth, to help with dependencies on teams. However, there is a set of metrics that the "See somethings" want, that help them understand where their initiatives are, and how much money and budget that they are spending. Those metrics themselves are pretty big, and those metrics help organizations to understand how they can improve that flow. Therefore, we have to set data systems to put that data in and deliver those key metrics. Those metrics can be the "See something" metrics, which are metrics around budget, they are around what is being planned and strategy and things like that.

Then you also have your engineering metrics. What is my flow through, what is the whole value stream metrics? Then you also have your DevOps metrics. All of these things come canned, because we can go look at the systems. Where the challenge is, most organizations have to buy one tool across all of those in order to get that visibility. Here at ConnectALL, you have the ability just to connect those and aggregate that data together, to get visibility across your whole software development value stream. There is an assessment that we start with. For example, what systems are you using, what are you using for desk DevOps, what are your scanning tools, what are all the quality tools that you are using? We can pick a way to get going quickly with those. Maybe it is just increasing flow from your DevOps tools, to your backlog tools, your task management tools, and then getting some of those initial metrics up front.

"When I think about ConnectALL, and if I think about a client and what we are trying to do, our mission, which is to help software companies develop software more efficiently, many times they are not diving into the traditional, lean, continuous improvement practices that you should get educated on and learn how to use them to be really efficient in your software development world, and we are trying to offer that education. Then when you are ready, when you understand your development framework and all those tools, you can come to ConnectALL, and we will help automate it." Lance Knight

It is getting some of those initial metrics up front, that let you see how effective am I there, without having to boil the ocean. However, it all starts with this kind of assessment of looking at where all the different tools, human processes and things that you are doing to develop software. We also help, not just using a software, but saying that these things may be non-value added, how do we automate those. When I say non-value added, that is more of a lean principal of looking at value added and not value-added work, back from the days of manufacturing when I learned that.

CEOCFO: Do most companies recognize there is a problem? Are they looking for a better way to figure out what is going on?

Mr. Knight: Many of them should be on a continuous improvement process, when it is about anything that you are doing. As we are heading into 2023/2024, where the world and economy seems to be going, you should continue to invest in programs and process for continuing improvement. Continuous improvement does some key things. It improves your velocity, makes you more predictable, but it also reduces your cost, so you save money by doing this in order to be more effective. It is just part of what these programs can do for you.

CEOCFO: When you are talking with prospective clients, do they understand that? Are they looking for a more concrete ROI, such as, you do this and look how much you might save? Or is it intuitive? By the time they come to you have they already figured that out?

Mr. Knight: By the time customers come to us, they are normally looking for a specific thing to improve flow. Then we are able to introduce these concepts to them about how they can be more efficient. If I can automate a non-value added activity, and not have somebody doing that, that is a cost saving, that is an ROI. That person can then work on some more value-added activity. They are not really aware of many of those things, because the IT industry really has not totally adopted these lean, continuous improvement types of methods and processes. They are still stuck in their day-to-day of managing their things, so we find ourselves doing a lot of thought leadership around that.

Our assessment programs actually have kind of a rep now, too, although right now people are not thinking in this way, and that is the thought leadership process about bringing lean in systems thinking principles to organizations. That is not totally our product, by the way. That is our consulting part of what we do, but sometimes our products include that.

CEOCFO: *Would you tell us about the different solutions, or is it just one solution and a company might just choose certain parts?*

Mr. Knight: We actually offer three solutions. We have three products that make up our platform. The first one is a complimentary value stream mapping solution, that you can go to valuestreammanagement.com, sign up, and you can drag and drop and lay out your tools, and see how they are connected and look at how you are going to lead or flow, right there. It is free, complimentary, and just part of what we offer as part of promoting this kind of thought. Then at ConnectALL, we have our automation platform.

Our automation platform is where we can set up tools, improve flow, we can set up different types of connections and integrations and synchronizations between different tools. We can set up connections and integrations into data marts. That would be like your flow control center for your software delivery against all of these different tools. Then we have our analytics platform, which gives you a set of metrics that help you be more predictable in each are of the organization that you are responsible for.

CEOCFO: *What has changed in your approach over time? What have you learned as more and more people are using your solutions, and also as technology may have changed?*

Mr. Knight: I have been doing technology for a while, so I will try to keep it to the last 5 years. Our approach is changing over time as we are looking at how we help organizations, not just with the products that we offer, but with the thought leadership and the understanding of these principals, in order to help them to be more proficient at developing software, and using lean principals that I learned back in manufacturing, decades ago, to look at your system and how you are developing software, and then use that knowledge of how to remove waste. Waste is a lean principal, it is also called Muda, it this is how things are happening, and then have a look at that, and say, "I can put a tool in there, I can change the way I am doing it." Over the last years, most IT organizations and software development in large organizations, that grew-up underneath the CFO and has grown up organically, not planned, so there are all types of areas in these organizations where you can help them be more efficient by using automation type techniques in the value stream and so on.

Our approach has changed to this more consultative approach, rather than this product approach to helping organizations be more efficient and bring our product along for that ride at the same time. Technology is become really very interesting, as we are looking at implementing and integrating prediv analytics, machine learning, AI, into how we represent data in our analytics product. Having the ability to say that part of being predictable is being able to see forward, so if I improve a team, or add more people to a team, or create more teams, I have the ability to see how that will affect my velocity and predictability against the whole thing. There is a lot of putting in the thought process of adding those types of things and that type of technology into our analytics, and into looking into value stream, which is the tool and how all the data flows within it, is where I see the technology going. Much of what we do us integration. Therefore, a vision that I have is that I see using AI and prediv technologies just to automatically integrate tools at a moment and moving the configuration.

CEOCFO: *How easy is it for a company to look at the results? How do you make sure that the charts, the grafts, what someone is viewing makes sense to them?*

Mr. Knight: Absolutely. I call those meaningful metrics. I got this great chart that shows me cycle times through my software development and delivery. Great! Now I know my cycle time. What do I do with that? We call those meaningful metrics, metrics that you can make decisions from. To try to understand, we use a process called goal question metric, what is the goal of understanding this, what is the question you are asking, and how is this metric helping me, and how can I make business decisions from it.

We spent a lot of time in the metrics that we put in place to make sure that they are truly meaningful and are reactionable, that you can take a look at it and say that this tells me that this one person is a bottleneck in my process, because everything must go through them. Well, why is that? Or providing a percentage of complete against all of my stuff in my value stream, and then actually being able to drill in and see that this is why I am blocked right now, who do I

go help that team unblock. Therefore, meaningful metrics, relevant metrics, and I guess the term I like to use the most is actionable metrics, metrics that I can actually look at and decide whether I am on track or not on track, or what I need to do. We do offer those as well.

CEOCFO: *Are there particular types, sizes, geographies, or industries that embrace ConnectALL more than others, or where you are looking to make inroads?*

Mr. Knight: The nice thing about the way we work at ConnectALL is that we can be efficient for smaller teams or even larger teams. That is because what we do is basically integrate and automate the flow of information between different tools. Therefore, no matter what the size of your organization is you can get value out of whatever product of service we are offering in looking at your software processes.

We found that the companies that normally get the most value out of what we do are a little bit larger, but even small teams get rapid value, and different market segments get rapid value out of what we offer.

CEOCFO: *What is the competitive landscape?*

Mr. Knight: The thing is, as interesting as I look at the competitive landscape in value stream management and enterprise value stream management, there is a myriad of companies that are doing different things within that market. However, it is not always end to end. There are just all these different things that go across that. You have got some companies to compete with, like I compete with Service Now. I was a partner of Service Now. The way I compete with them is they are trying to do what I do, but all within their tool. Everyone has to be a user of Service Now. Everybody has to use their solution. Okay great. Sometimes that does not work in organizations, but if you want to get that flow or those metrics, everybody has to use that tool. Think about ConnectALL as the railroad control center over top of your software delivery. If you have service at one place, some other tool at another place, we aggregate that and bring that together. Sometimes we compete with them.

Sometimes we compete with companies that only have a set of metrics that they are offering. However, what we have found in competing with them is that they maybe have a nice pretty chart, which we also have, but we have the other piece, and that is the ability to get to the data effortlessly, where most organizations have not built that out. We also compete with large companies like IBM from time to time, so we compete with a host of companies.

CEOCFO: *Why should people choose ConnectALL? Is there anything that a potential client might miss or misunderstand that they really need to know?*

Mr. Knight: When I think about ConnectALL, and if I think about a client and what we are trying to do, our mission, which is to help software companies develop software more efficiently, many times they are not diving into the traditional, lean, continuous improvement practices that you should get educated on and learn how to use them to be really efficient in your software development world, and we are trying to offer that education. Then when you are ready, when you understand your development framework and all those tools, you can come to ConnectALL, and we will help automate it.

We will get you the metrics to help you be more predictable and understand what metrics are most important to you. We have the facilities to help people do that. I think sometimes that message gets lost in the product message.

