

# 124-personal-knowledge-management-with-zettelkasten-producti...

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

schema, articles, knowledge, capturing, evernote, system, search, pieces, ideas, create, find, index, note, apply, information, instapaper, content, read, point, talking

## SPEAKERS

Art Gelwicks, Voiceover Artist, Raymond Sidney-Smith, Francis Wade, Augusto Pinaud

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Voiceover Artist 00:00

Are you ready to manage your work and personal world better to live a fulfilling productive life, then you've come to the right place. ProductivityCast the weekly show about all things productivity, here are your hosts, Ray Sidney-Smith and a Gousto pinout with Francis Wade and art Gelwicks.



Raymond Sidney-Smith 00:17

Welcome back, everybody to ProductivityCast, the weekly show about all things personal productivity. I'm Ray Sidney-Smith.



Augusto Pinaud 00:23

I'm Augusto Pinaud.



Francis Wade 00:23

Francis Wade.



Art Gelwicks 00:24

And I'm Art Gelwicks.



Raymond Sidney-Smith 00:25

Welcome, gentlemen, and welcome to our listeners to this episode of ProductivityCast. This week, we are going to step our toe into a little bit more of our note taking methodology topics that we were talking about earlier. And of course, that's going to get very muddy very soon. But we're interested in discussing the concept of zettelkasten. And today, what we're going to do is we're going to define the concept of zettelkasten, as best as we can, as the ProductivityCast team, and then talk about the ways in which people use zettelkasten in the in their own personal productivity methods and systems. And then talk a little bit about how you can maybe get started utilizing zettelkasten in your own work and life. And so let's start off with jumping into what is zettelkasten. And for those of you who are a little bit confused, it's ze TT ELKSTN. zettelkasten is a German word that means Slingbox, kind of like, think about the Dewey Decimal System in the old libraries, where you would put little cards into those little slip boxes. That's the the term that was used by this particular gentleman who developed the system. Art Do you want to give us a little bit of background on zettelkasten, where it came from, and then we can all kind of dive in and give our interpretations of what several caston is,

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Art Gelwicks 01:44

here's the nutshell version, the original premise. And unfortunately, I'm going to, I can't, I'm drawing a blank on the author's name, or the the writers name, but he's maybe a goose, or maybe Ray, you remember his name, very prolific writer, 400, articles, books, everything generated huge amounts of content. And he developed this system called zettelkasten, to allow him to organize all the knowledge he needed around these topics and all this research content. Now keep in mind, this was all pre digital tech. So he designed all this in an analog platform, basically index cards, and he would put a piece of information he learned or a quote, or a reference item on a card and have a specific index, a referencing number system to allow him to identify each one of those pieces. And then based on each one of those pieces, he's then able to go through and say, Okay, now how do these relate to each other? What are what are the concepts that are tied to this particular item. So let's say for example, I'm I don't know I'm writing a paper on flowers. And I find a reference piece of information about a particular type of flower, the zettelkasten, not only would have an index related to how this fits into my system, but also all the pieces that this is a flower, and this is maybe about pollination. And this is about location. The the core energy around this, if I can use the term energy is to create the relationships between the ideas, and in basically an old school method of hyperlinking. So that within each idea, you have those connections to the other ideas. So by being able to leverage those connections, you can find relationships between information and ideas that you normally would not recognize. And see. It's designed to handle a huge volume of information. And it's also designed to be very scalable. Its liability was always at the time. Because it was analog, it was it literally, and I can't again, I can't think of the guy's name. But if you look up one of his quotes he talked about that he always worked at in partnership with his zettelkasten. That's a big level of commitment for any system. I mean, if you're going to consider that system to be an equal to you, and whatever you're doing, adds a crazy level of commitment. With digital technology, it's easier to do the mechanical parts that were so prohibitive within zettelkasten to create the hyperlinks to create backlinks and the relationships within there to be able to do the search indexing around content to find those relationships between ideas. But it doesn't change the fact that this is something that really lends itself to pure knowledge management. I don't know that I would try to use a zettelkasten for task management or even managing a project. But if it's all the information around various topics, this becomes that kind of second brain type of approach and it doesn't have to be for just a topic. If you're working on say a thesis or something like that, you could use a zettelkasten to do that. But there's no classes designed to

grow well beyond that. And its benefit comes from the fact that you may be putting content in there for your thesis. But you may also be putting content in there. From a series of articles, you're just randomly reading, and identify relationships between those things that you normally would not see, just because of how those hyperlinks are. I don't want to say organically created, but they develop on their own as they as you start to see the contextual relationships. I'm not doing the explanation of this justice, because it is a fairly complex thing to initially get set up. But at its core, thinking about dealing with those abstract pieces of information that we find very valuable in and of themselves. But we don't know what to do with and never truly realizing the the benefit of those interacting with each other. Well, that's where something like zettelkasten comes in.



Raymond Sidney-Smith 06:03

Yeah, so the person you're probably thinking about was Nicholas Lumen, or Lumen in German. And so he's a sociologist, and quite prolific, as you noted. And so I really think about zettelkasten in terms of like capturing knowledge in ways that are purpose driven. One is reference. So I would consider that knowledge management. The other, of course, is being able to file then filter and find what I've consumed. And what I want to be able to remember from my readings, and that being able to help support me as I'm writing new material. And so you know, as I'm writing any longer term piece of material, I want to be able to capture and surface those items. So I think about the zettelkasten method from that perspective most frequently. And I think you've captured most of the pieces that I think would help to define what the zettelkasten method really does, and how it helps someone as a in their own system.

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Art Gelwicks 06:56

One point I did leave out and this is this was something that came up looking at it related to digital technology, is that one of the key things about zettelkasten is its small captures, we're not capturing like entire dissertations into the zettelkasten. These are all individual quotes, individual facts, individual items. And it's because they're small, they can relate to each other much more effectively than something that's large and comprehensive. It's a common question that you see, when people when you start to research implementing zettelkasten in a digital note taking tool, a lot of the feedback that you'll see as well, does it how well does it handle little notes. And that's exactly what we're talking about is the zettelkasten requires little notes. Most of our note taking tools are really designed around longer form notes. One note is a really common tool for using for zettelkasten. And that's one of the first questions is well, one note likes big notes, not necessarily little notes, but you can do that. So it's it's an important context to apply around it. When you think about a book you may be reading, you're pulling all those little things out. So the best example I can give you is if you would sit there and highlight something, that highlighted thing is a great candidate for zettelkasten card. Because that is an individual piece, you're not going to highlight four pages, well, I would hope not. But those individual core items, those are the pieces and the ideas that you would drop into that zettelkasten system to start to lay the groundwork for those connections,



Raymond Sidney-Smith 08:29

you bring up a really great point art, which is that there are some core principles behind zettelkasten method, which is, of course, the principle of atom assisity. And which is basically

having these atomic topics, these topics that are singular and kind of finite in their in their boundaries. And then of course, being able to connect them among each other as you talked about before. So those are really the two binary principles that really helped to bind what is zettelkasten at its core. I wasn't familiar

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Augusto Pinaud 08:59

with the settled Gaston methodology. I research it, you know, for this podcast, but one of the things that I couldn't define before was my use of Evernote. Such as similar to that concept I may read in my Kindle and highlight, you know, something on the Kindle and one thing I really like to do is take a screenshot, send it to Evernote and sometimes make the comment. The cool thing with Evernote in this context is Evernote will index my note will index the page where I highlight on the Kindle will have the text on that image and really make it super cool to be able to search so I can search words, terms ideas, and it will give me all that content that I have collected. I can tell you based on my research, if that is you know fit every principle of the cell Katherine I don't know but it feels a lot. It fit a lot of them and and it's what you described there is not about it's not about the book, the book is not never to find to be found on. On Evernote, maybe the Getting Things Done book because so many highlights over the years. But most books are not it's really that paragraph or those two lines and, and the idea that made me thought about what, why that was important. But what that has built and over the year is a really cool database that I didn't again, until you put it the name settle counselor, I will have never call it that way. But it's is that if you may give me a quote, and the quote will go into there. And we'll you know, the little note on there made by me why why this was relevant, you know, all that get indexed in a really cool way, in my opinion. And it really make that knowledge database really, really powerful.

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Art Gelwicks 10:56

And you you hit on another piece I missed there, which is supplying not only the piece of knowledge, but why the piece of knowledge is is important. If you look a lot of templated structures that are designed, there's templates out there for things like notion in OneNote, and various, various solutions. But they all include that capture point of the piece of knowledge, and its relevancy to what is its value, and then you establish the connections between the other pieces. And I think that's one of that's one of the things I've had to take away most strongly about this as I start to look at my own system through a zettelkasten lens is when I capture information, often I'll capture the information knowing at that point that that could be potentially useful or interesting. But I'm not taking the time to say, Why do I consider that potentially interesting or useful. And being able to establish that additional level of metadata on the knowledge gives me the opportunity to then say, well, show me everything in my zettelkasten that is around motivational quotes or motivation for periods of depression. Those may not be things that I normally categorize, I would have to pre go through and tag them. But being able to apply those basic concepts as to why I think this would be a good thing you can, you can pull those contextual pieces back out. And it's really best seen, if you look in YouTube, and you look for demonstrations and zettelkasten Not so much the setup, but how they're used, once they're created. Those are the ones that I think provide the best understanding as to how this can make a difference within the environment. It's again, it's not easy, I got a long way to go before I even get started on this. But I can already start to see how there would be a huge amount of benefit just again, for that generic knowledge that I have.



Raymond Sidney-Smith 12:57

France, if you were a brand new person to zettelkasten, what questions would you would might you have for,



13:05

for us, like Greek so far, and I am brand new to this,



Francis Wade 13:09

there's no pretending here, I tell you what I'm hearing so far. But the part that I'm missing, I'm hearing that it you're building a structure of knowledge through for someone who collects a lot of information like I am someone who does that around specific topics, and I tagged with each piece of information, what I don't have are the links in the body of the knowledge I have connected to each other so they don't link to each other it from content to content. So to use our example of what the flows if I collect information on flows, and then different articles happen to mention, I forget the example you but let's say pot, then whatever has been prompted to do is say pot is important to me track pot and everytime pot comes up in an article in the future then make sure that like patch aware pots are mentioned so that when I a year from now I want to go do research on pot, I can find the reference across all articles that happened to mention pot because I've already invested the time to create the link between the articles is that accurate



Art Gelwicks 14:13

or partially and it and it is truly a benefit you can have just purely for organizing the the knowledge information. But let's take a slightly different, different point. Let's say for example, that two years from now you're working on something that is not related to flowers. Maybe it's related to cultivation, maybe it's related to climate change. And somewhere in that flower research that you had done, there was something about you know, nature friendly farming. I'm making stuff up at this point. But that dotted line between those two unless you had created it would not happen without something like a zettelkasten zettelkasten allows you to provide the structures or round each piece of knowledge to say that, okay, in this article about flowers, there was a mention about, you know, eco friendly farming, great. It had no context or relevance to what you were doing at the time. But in the future, as you started to work on some other other topic that also talked about eco friendly farming, that flower article, or that flower flower knowledge piece, could be pulled into that directly when you go in and say, Okay, well, what do I have about eco friendly farming, and all of a sudden, these pieces start to come out of various spots out of your zettelkasten. It's kind of interesting to do it through a digital tool, because it almost feels a little bit magical when it's set up, right? Because like I said, you grab a topic, and all of a sudden these things that you're like, oh, wait, I totally forgot I had that. Or I totally forgot, I referenced or looked that up. And that's, that's the context problem that I have is, and, to me, the best solution, or the best application to this is to finally get my freakin feed reader under control. You look at all the articles you go through, and all the different pieces, I mean, my my reading list, and Instapaper, and Flipboard, and everything like that is just

massive. And there's tons of content and every one of those articles. But to be able to pull those individual pieces out, apply, like we were talking about with a Gousto. Why is this important to me? Or why did I find this particular thing interesting? Interesting, put the context around it, put it into this little cast and system, and then know that at later points, relevant contexts can be pulled together without intentionally having to go through and map this to that to the other thing, too. The other thing, like I said, it's, it's very hard to describe, we do a lot of this already. When you go in and you put a note in your system, and you tag it. And maybe you create a hyperlink in your system to another article, you're doing a lot of that work already. It's just a slightly more focused approach to knowledge, rather than, like, say, meeting minutes.

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Augusto Pinaud 17:11

So let me let me provide an example that I have that I think it fits to today's okay, I began collecting, my first home office was built on 2003. And it was expensive and a massive failure. That's the two words that define that first home office. But I begin collecting ideas and I begin collecting what worked, what didn't work. So if I go right now to my Evernote, that is where my equivalent of the cellcast and leap, I can type home office. And it will bring 12 years of articles of ideas of things, and, more importantly, will bring the evolution of my knowledge from that home office. Okay, who I happen to open that one that says, you bought two large desk in IKEA, so you can get the most space out of this room. Okay. And I really read this and laugh, because I'm looking at my current setup. And instead of using the most of the room, I want to have everything as close to me as possible. But that shows you that evolution. But as I look in other nodes, they are the initial time this was collected, and there is an update note. So as I understood this knowledge into a different way, I was able to come back to that initial node and say, update this change and change because of these reasons. So if I spent probably enough time in here, I will be able to find how my home office came from that initial idea in 2013. To the current setup I have right now, do I go back that much when I'm looking into it? Maybe not maybe, you know, when I did the last adjustment on my home office, he was adjustment based on recording podcasting, and video conferencing. So that was an important thing to adjust. But I can go back to all the ideas I have pulled for this, you know why? Why do I have? If you asked me Why do you use a tablet, just to do what we're doing right now there is a recent there is a researcher, it's an article that I will be able to pull out of that that explain why I made that decision, or at least will be an article or an idea that my note of why these weren't his way.

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Art Gelwicks 19:33

And that's one of the probably the biggest things about this is scalability. From the very beginning it is defined as a highly scalable system, it can ramp up to hold pretty much whatever you need into it. And when you talk about these types of things, such as you know, your home office and defining that kind of content. You may set up your home office and you have all this information and knowledge that you gathered around it. But then you continue to gather that even though the home office is done, you continue to gather new ideas, you know, as standing desks become popular, you started to gather knowledge articles around why would I do a standing desk? Why wouldn't I do a standing desk? And all of that starts to feed into the system? The challenge that this gets into is that often people will say, Well, why go through all this effort? Why can't I just put all the content into Evernote or OneNote, or whatever, and just use search, I should be able to just use search. But it goes back to what we talked about earlier, capturing raw content without providing the why really diminishes its long term value, at least

from what I can see. I mean, I again, I look at my content that I have, I have massive amounts of stuff that I'm I have not referenced it more than once, since I originally read it. I captured it. I know I captured it. And if I go back and I look at it, like, yeah, I could probably figure out why I captured it, why this was important. But why am I why am I spending those cycles to do that.

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Augusto Pinaud 21:08

But I think that's the difference. If you look, again, if you open my Instapaper account, I'm not going to say how many articles are in there, they are beautifully organized into folders, by topic. Okay, if you want to research and read everything I have collected Instapaper about home office, you will find a vast number of articles. The problem is, in order for me to get information out of that, I need to spend a significant amount of time rereading all those articles that at some point, for some reason I file in there, there is no way that's going to happen, when happened on Evernote is when I searched that same topic, because that's where that file system leave. When I search, what I found is that note I may not find the whole article, I may find the link, sometimes not even the link. And I have get mad at myself for that. I need to go into Google and try to find the article again. But at least I found that quote or that paragraph and why that was relevant. And sometimes there are some of them that has 234 updates over the year on that idea. Yeah, I have talked in this podcast many times about that article from Paul Graham, okay about the maker and the manager time. Okay, if you search on my Evernote maker and manager, you will find not only the original article, not only things I have seen from other writers about it paragraph, not the whole article menu. But more importantly, you will find my comments on why that add value to the knowledge I had before. So if I need to write something about that, or I want to explain it to somebody else, I can go there search that. And he will give me all the evolution of thought if you if you keep you want scholar this way, Joe will find all the breadcrumbs I have leave myself to be able to find back my train of thought without costing me an unlimited number of cycles



Raymond Sidney-Smith 23:18

to take a Gousto system and make it as metalcasting, quote unquote, system, you would then go through that search and actually apply a tag that tells you what those things are the meaning of what those things are. And then you're doing the thought work that art is really talking about. I'm saying like why did why are these bound together? Why am I binding these particular granular items to each other in the system. And then that becomes a part of the tagging functionality that zettelkasten talks about of connecting those pieces. They're utilizing, quote unquote, tags in the system. And that taxonomy ultimately becomes the way in which you find things over time, because you've done the work.

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Art Gelwicks 24:02

That's and that's probably the most important thing is if we start to bridge this into how you could do something like this, when you look at the tool that you're using for this tagging has to be one of its strengths. If you find if you're trying to use a tool, like it talked about earlier, were you short notes. So one of my first reflexes was oh, wait, I could use something like Google Keep for this. And yes, I could use something like Google Keep for this because it has a tagging capability. I don't know that it's a massively strong tape tagging capability, but it does have it.



Raymond Sidney-Smith 24:36

Yeah, labels. By the way, anybody who's unaware, it's called labels, just like in Gmail, when you

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Art Gelwicks 24:41

look at that part of it. One of the other pieces that you need for the tools to come back is this idea of what's called backlinking. It's stressed a lot and many applications are starting to have this now. And basically all it comes down to is if I'm creating a note and I link it to a another note So I put a hyperlink in this note that goes back to a previous one, what the system does is it goes to the previous note and says, Oh, guess what, there's a link to you from this other note, it automatically creates that two way connection. And when you look at the digital definitions around zettelkasten, implementations, this is really one of the key pieces, because if you follow the breadcrumbs, one direction, you should be able to follow the breadcrumbs, any direction from that. So if we use the home office example that a Gousto is using, you may have all the information about home office, but you may want to follow home office and then dealing with depression, and then motivation, and then so on and so forth. Well, if we do a pure tagging environment, you have to know all those tags in advance. But through the process of backlinking, you can follow this thought thread all the way through, because of the connections between them. It does require you to do this, though, there's no automatic system that I've seen that will generate these for you this is we go back to that commitment to this becoming your partner. But if you're going to reap these supposedly magical level benefits, yeah, it's gonna take some effort.

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Francis Wade 26:15

It sounds as if you're constructing schema, a row and you're sort of Knowledge Network, you're trying to depict the knowledge as you knew it at a particular point in time. And I say that emphasize the at a particular point in time, because it takes an investment to create that schema. However, for brand new topics. And I find myself doing this a lot thinking of something brand new, going into my old information. And seeing that the there is no place where I could have captured that email because it's a brand new one. Let's say for example, auto scheduling didn't I didn't know it existed before a particular date. And before that date, I had a schema in my mind about how calendars were used. And if I had stuck to that schema, I wouldn't have gotten to I wouldn't have developed any value for the effort to go find the information that I wanted to find, I find myself looking back to old notes that I've captured, but I'm looking for something brand new. And I'm wondering if the this is the kind of face off between using Google search and Evernote tags versus EtherCAT. That will cost them because the cost is essentially preserving your schema up to a particular point in time but can't brute search on Google supplemented with a few other smart search to cut they when they can't they give you if not the same result or better results. And why bother invest the time to create the links if all they're going to do is tell you what you thought at a particular moment in time? It's a why bother question?

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Art Gelwicks 27:48

Well, and it's a really valid question. And this is like, guess just personal knowledge

well, and it's a really valid question. And this is like, across just general knowledge management? Why would you go to the effort of building all the metadata around something when you could utilize search to actually pull context back? One of the discussions I get in with that frequently is okay, if you can get the term exactly right, you'll get a result back. I mean, searches semantic search, no matter how generalized, you get, still limits itself based on the relative context of the term you've provided versus what was actually in the contact context. So if we use you know, if you're searching on depression, the term itself you should be able to find fairly easy. But if you find if you're have an article that has not depression, but bad mood, well searches useless for you, even though contextually, you know, for your own purposes, that they're relevant. The thing that I want to be clear about is zettelkasten is not and just this, in general, this is not a once and done exercise, you don't get a piece of knowledge, put it into the system, categorize it, you know, put your information on it, and then never touch it again, if it comes back up in your activities, and you have a refinement to make on it, you make that refinement, you add that additional contextual information, you change its relevance to you based on what you need, and you allow it to evolve. That's one of the things that I think is most intriguing about this is this is truly a living system. You allow your knowledge to continue to evolve, as it has been applied. And as that is applied. So when we talk about this context piece, physical fitness, let's say you're talking about those things, and you're looking at those topics. Well, all of a sudden standing desks may be qualified now in your mind within the physical fitness realm, because it has those impacts. But it also was relative to personal productivity. That may not have been something when you captured the idea originally. But now as you go through and you continue to look at your information and your ideas and work things, this is not where knowledge should go to die. This is what where it should go to kind of mill around with another knowledge. Real bad example. This is not a knowledge file cabinet. This is a knowledge cocktail party. It should be it should be socializing with other knowledge bumping into each other chatting each other up and finding new connections.

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Francis Wade 30:17

When I do a search today is like, Yeah, but when I do a search today, and it's not just a matter of looking for keywords, I'm also looking to explore other people's schema. So for example, when someone writes an article that links depression and mood and bad mood, that link may not be there in 90 days. So it may emanate, for example, or in my articles that I've collected, I mean, never heard me constructed, or I may have forgotten to or may not have realized the link, but other people have. So when I do a search for depression, other people, it'll pull up articles that others have written to the power of having grid search, which I think is the I think central caster was made at a time when you didn't have great search. So you had to create your own schema, because you will never find anything. But to the end world, we can borrow other people's schemas just by doing the research just by and we can find people, we can follow the breadcrumbs that aren't historic breadcrumbs, because they're not laid by an individual to say, Okay follows steps one through 10. But they are nonetheless effective, because the keywords reside together in different articles, different places, and the connection of the keywords to each other in different places, as you're searching builds a real time schema, as opposed to one that start, that's 10 times more powerful, because it gets right to the moment rather than something that you put together way back when



Raymond Sidney-Smith 31:41

I'll contradict that with the point that if you look at Google as being a an ocean, a vast ocean of data, which it is, and you're using a search engine to find information, that's like a search engine, which

data, which it is your reference system, your personal knowledge management system, which is part of zettelkasten, it's not all of it, but part of it, it's your ability to be able to filter it down to things that you want to be able to see, it's a way of filtering what Google has into what you want to keep, and to be able to surface at a point in time in the future that otherwise couldn't be done as fast. By virtue of an ongoing basis doing this work, you're capable of then getting together your ideas connected to the research and reference you've done in the past. And seeing those together. I use always the example of stoicism. So I can't remember everything that Seneca has ever said, or Marcus Aurelius has ever said, about stoicism. And my own thoughts as it relates to those. If I do a search on Google, Google will not have my own internal thoughts. I don't want Google to have those. I just want those to be in my own system, I can't see those weave together. And that's the real value, I think of zettelkasten. It's this ability to be able to, on an ongoing basis, filter out the rubbish because the reality is, is that for you, you want to see, if you did that search on depression, you want to see other people's thoughts about bad mood, I want to just understand it in relation to how I feel. In that example, I want to be able to do that search once get my thoughts together, get them into a system that I can then refine and understand and surface at my leisure that doesn't require Google and doing all of that filtering and organization again. So zettelkasten is about capturing and organizing that information and applying your own thoughts to it. And then you have this newly refined component there. And even if I go back out to Google, I'm applying and refining that to the existing information that I've already created. The idea here is to be able to capture and refine, capture and refine, capture and refine until when I want to find something, I can absolutely find it. Because I can't determine that Google will always have that page indexed from the past. People always say, you know, Google is forever, something's indexed on Google. That's not true. Because people can change pages, people can take websites down. And while we have the Internet Archive and other places, there is lost data. In that sense, your zettelkasten is a permanent solution to an ongoing problem.

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Francis Wade 34:17

I have I have an example. Because the word the word that triggered me is the word permanent. So I'm doing research right now on a new a new area and going into the gamut here, but it has to do with strategic planning retreat. So it's something I've done for the last 20 years. I have articles on planning retreats for the last 20 years, sort of in Evernote, and but I've never really thought of going into it, you know, creating a website offering a service that anybody could get benefit from. So this is something brand new, but it's built on this prior knowledge. So what I have found myself doing is yes, I started off doing Google searches and those were not very fruitful, but I found myself trying a couple book reading articles per week. Search gait, academic articles because what while they're not doing exactly what I want them to do, they indicate to me what different people's schemas are. So I'm not looking for the information per se in like in a Google search, I'm looking for the schema. And what I'm doing is I'm using that to update my schema. So I'm not the object I'm looking for is not the data. It's the interrelationships between the data, and which is very more abstract than it is. But that's the only way that I could update my schema so that it's current is by borrowing other people's know, when I eventually land on a new schema. And I'm almost there, I think, because I've read almost everything there is not much to read, unfortunately, in this area, it's not going to take long before I've exhausted all those sorts of I have a new schema in mind. But the permanent part of what you said is the fact that I'm responding to, it's not going to be permanent. And I actually don't care what to capture my current schema, I care to use it, but I don't need to capture it. In other words, I can have it as a tool to use as I add to it in the future, which I will

do. But I don't care to go through the effort of making it a historic document, because in a way I don't need to because the schema, the building blocks of schemas that other people have provided are already out

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Art Gelwicks 36:14

there, you can apply some of the core zettelkasten concepts to what you're trying to accomplish. So for example, if I was researching for a book, I could go through and do all of my research and build that model within build that information model within a zettelkasten type of approach. Knowing that after writing that book, I may never use that again. And my intention is to throw that out afterwards. There's nothing preventing me from doing that, I can absolutely apply that strategy to it. It does run counter to the benefit of zettelkasten as an overall knowledge management strategy. But the structures can still be applied, you're talking about relevancy of content to each other organizational structures. And it's, it's a challenge that we've got now go back to a gastos comment about his Instapaper. I have Instapaper, too. I love it for reading articles. No. But it's terrible at this, I would love for it to have a much better way of structuring and I'm trying to do is I'm in the midst of an experiment right now where I'm doing, basically everything I can just through my phone to see if it's doable. And this is one of those liabilities, I go into an article, I think it's great, I put it in a folder, the folder has it. But that's that silo, I don't have those cross connections. So now I want to take that particular topic or that particular segment and say, Okay, what are the relevant pieces around this? How do I tag those? Well, the application itself kind of falls on its face when it gets to that. So I need another structure now to say, how do I put this into that structure? And how does that continue to use and evolve, I can see the benefits of the knowledge because I know this is a weakness that I have is the relationship between the information that's stuck in my head and everywhere else. But being able to put the architecture in place to support that, that seems to be where I'm struggling a little bit. But that's partially because of how I'm choosing to do it right now, I could certainly do it straight off the desktop and find a number of different ways to handle this. But again, it doesn't have to be a life commitment, you could start something like this small, especially since it is really designed around research. I mean, I think it's one of those things, if you could clean it up a little bit would be great for college students to be able to work through, you know, courses, and that sort



Raymond Sidney-Smith 38:38

by said it was a permanent solution to an ongoing problem, which is that the goal here is that the solution the methodology works, but you do have to keep utilizing it in order for you just solve for that problem that your schema is temporal. The the system shouldn't be though. And where I would probably reject the notion that you would say, Oh, I'm just going to write a book, and then I'm going to chuck the whole thing out, the whole idea is is that then it becomes a part of what I call an external brain, right, the idea that I have, and what I use is Evernote to be my external brain, my idea of personal knowledge management, to build my own personal knowledge management system, I don't use, I use a lot of principles that would be considered zettelkasten. I actually started developing my own personal knowledge management system many years before I ever learned about zettelkasten. And the the notion of using zettelkasten is that you have to trust the process. And then once you start utilizing things that many times people don't recognize how they're going to modify their their systems in order to be able to really take most advantage of it. But really, it's about consistency to any process is better than

inconsistency to no process. And the goal here is to be able to apply something so that you have some control on it. It's not going to solve every problem in your life, it's not a panacea. But it certainly does drive further innovation. For example, my ultimate thought whenever I talk to small business owners is take disparate industries like waste management, and pottery, and mash those together. And you probably have a new business, right? Just think about any of those disparate thoughts. And if we can start to apply what you're calling schema, metadata, some applied knowledge on top of the information that we have in our systems, we start to percolate new ideas. And I think that's the most powerful thing that I've ever found from a reference system, that personal knowledge management system is the ability to bibble percolate those ideas that I otherwise wouldn't have had, if I didn't have a love for language. And if I didn't have a love for small business, I wouldn't find the complementary components there. I love that notion of being able to connect things that otherwise don't seem like they connect. And now they can, because I can start to ideate in a way that I don't think I would be able to do if I was left to my own devices, navel gazing,

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Francis Wade 41:01

I wonder if there's definite value to what you're describing in the system. And I wonder if the two issues come up as volume or volume and the volume of information that we must process, you know, the sources and the speed with which we must invent new schema. And I guess I'm concerned that if I would pick up that part, not a good candidate, but it will basically slow me down. Because, you know, I just like this, like it said, I use packet. And I have 100 articles coming in today that I have signed up for not random stuff, stuff that I'm interested in which I could filter it from source, but the way to do that just comes in, like, you know, like floods, and I have to go through it, and very quickly decide whether it has value or not. And then again, I'm also behind on that, as usual, but the speed with which is coming in the volume is coming in. And the rate at which I need to create new schema, make me wonder if that if I took the step back to do all this linking that you're describing. So this is a practical thing. If I did the linking required by double casting, I would fall behind in terms of the volume of new information, and the speed with which I need to create a new schema. In other words, it would be well the principles are sewn to follow the steps that I think I've read would be would slow me down. That's my concern.

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Art Gelwicks 42:24

I don't I don't know. And I'm glad you brought a pocket because I'm literally while we're talking, I'm sitting here playing with pocket just to see how it handles the stuff. And to be able to do a highlight in a paragraph and then do a share over to another application like one note, it's an easy enough couple of steps. But you're right, there is another step that has to happen. And that means that I have to go into OneNote now and apply the why. Because the why is not part captured as part of this, I could attach a comment, I can put that in there, I may be able to do that. But then I still need that tagging. And I still need that exercise. And I believe that's that's really part of the commitment to this type of a thing. If you're going to receive the value from it, you have to follow that step by step process to making that knowledge useful. Things like pocket, things like Instapaper, things like Feedly become massive buckets of information. I mean, we just dumped tons of stuff in there. And I don't know how much of that stuff we ever actually go back and utilize or could reap benefit from if we had a better way to organize it within those content structures. I also to raise point, I have concerned about the permanency of

that information, something like an Instapaper or something like a pocket. If they go away, all of my knowledge that I have put in that thing is now it may still exist somewhere out on the internet. I'm sure it does. But I don't have the time to go recreate that app by any stretch of the imagination. So just doing little things like the share function I was doing right here. It was copying over the quote or the highlight area and a link to the original piece. Now it's not creating connections between but it's a starting place. And now I can start to say okay, can I use this? But yeah, there's definitely labor involved. There's I can't say that there's any magical way for this to happen.



#### Raymond Sidney-Smith 44:19

To the point of where to get started. As we come near the close of our conversation today. The way to get started here is really to start with an area a point of pain, where you're constantly saying to yourself, you know what I really want to be able to remember this information together and I haven't been able to and going and at that point, finding in your various disparate systems where that data lives and start to bring it together. And by centralizing that data into a tool, whether that's paper into a digital tool, so that you can get it all digitally. That probably would work the best at least in my mind's eye. But you know, you may decide to put all of that into some paper system, maybe decide to print material or you know, put things in a centralized paper system, you could do that, obviously, it's been done in the past. The goal here, though, is to centralize it into a system and start to apply your thoughts and your own taxonomy to it so that you're able to find it in the future, meaning applying how these pieces connect, in some external system outside of your own brain. And I think that's the point that really helps to speed things up. It's kind of like the index in the back of a book, even to the effect that we've talked about the bullet journal on the show before, and the bullet journal really does adhere to quite a number of the the concepts of zettelkasten, by virtue of creating an index, that index then serving to be able to thread thoughts from many different volumes of your notebooks over time from your bullet journals over time, we're just collecting together that data in a centralized place. So I don't think that this the volume and speed issue is as much of a problem because for example, I can capture many different ideas around many different topics on a regular basis. And I do as that stuff comes into for me, Evernote, I may not look at that data, I may just grab it all, and then place it into a bucket, a notebook in Evernote lingo, and it's going to live there until I care about it. So I'm going to then at that point, add it to my zettelkasten system, so to speak, at the point in which it now makes sense for me to do so before that I was just capturing, organizing it and making it useful to me in that applied knowledge space, doesn't matter. If it doesn't matter. When it matters, that's when I'm going to apply attention to it and bring it all together. So you can you can do that. In that sense, I don't do that I'm I'm much more of a proactive knowledge management person, I want to make sure that I'm consistently everything that's captured into my system I want to tie it in, there are very few times when I'm just capturing into big buckets, and then doing it later. Because I just I like the incrementalism of seeing it just come together in that sense. But there are times when I didn't know that I wanted to tie disparate things together, as I talked about it before, you know examples of taking very distinct areas of the world. And bringing those together, I didn't know those tied together until they percolated from looking at them side by side. So then that becomes its own knowledge space to work in. So you can start from any point in reference, you don't have to really worry about it most likely that you have, most likely you have information, reference data that is around your world, if you can centralize that into a place and then make it useful to you in some way, shape or form. That's the goal here, it's to be able to make it useful to you in that sense. And capturing it in particular way, like capturing effectively is as important as organizing efficiently. Right. So capturing effectively means that we are capturing

in a way that we can get it out of the system efficiently later, not just capturing efficiently, because happening efficiently means we're doing no level of that organization, upfront, and which which, again, can just be a very difficult thing. Once you get to the other side of it, you need to actually look at that information.

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Augusto Pinaud 48:14

What is interesting as I'm listening, and again, as I mentioned, at the beginning of the show, the subtle casting concept was not something that I was necessarily aware of before I did search for this show. But I could see as I was reading, you know that similarities with my the system I have, but what was really interesting was the question that it is somewhere to be think and process is it is worth it for me to go back and try to index my current situation or start indexing for today. Either way, you know, I I don't know if I have value going nine years of notes back or index, Sam, as I use them. And hey, when I use or when I search for something, then that note comes up. Let me index that properly, I can see the value of that in I can see the value of being able to get that index and those and those connection that way. So this was a really useful research for me.

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Art Gelwicks 49:10

I think this is a great example of a system revealing a bigger problem. And I think it's a common problem that so many of us have is dealing with the wrong end of the firehose, when it comes to the information, the knowledge we want to gather and keep handy. I mean, if we think about this, when zettelkasten was first set up, yes, there were massive amounts of information, but not quite at your fingertips like Francis was talking about. Now. Everything's at your fingertips, you can immediately overwhelm yourself with huge quantities of totally irrelevant content by just a couple of clicks. So this as a way to start to look at that problem and say, well, maybe this isn't the answer, but it does have functionality that will help me get closer to the answer, I think can be that big step, like I said, just playing with it here, I've already started to find some ways that I can implement it. But there's no way I would consider mine zettelkasten by any stretch of the imagination,

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Francis Wade 50:12

I think what Ray said about having different Misko different schema sit side by side in a place that you can mix and match is magic. And I happen to go into that exact same process right now picking taking an approach that worked with two audiences and applying it to a brand third one. So but that that's a, that's a fundamental advantage to get, I think most of us are back in the Instapaper pocket kind of stage where we're trying to manage the flow does that and then once we're, once we've collected all this stuff, then doing that first read that first first sorting, and then once you saw that at that first time you read it, then adding it into your system so that they can then be at least managed and then adding it to a schema. I think there's there's almost like four steps, we're talking about the fourth step here. But what's changed is that when depo custom was created, there was no viable that the first step, there was a trickle, maybe. So it was like, you know, the guy who invented it didn't know an index card, that's easy, you know, we have a small lot of information, then managing managing using cards is

hard. But I think we have a we have a different a different problem. And I think we have therefore a different way to apply as a pastor, because we have way better tools than he had. However, the overall problems deliver every problem for different.



**Raymond Sidney-Smith 51:32**

Yes, this is a great topic, something of always inconsistent interest to me, which is knowledge management and note taking and how we actually externalize those systems for greater productivity. And I'm sure this will not be the last time we have this conversation. Thank you, gentlemen. While we are at the end of our discussion for this episode for this cast, the conversation, of course doesn't have to stop here. If you have a question or comment about what we discussed, feel free to visit our episode page on ProductivityCast dotnet. There on the podcast website at the bottom of the page, you will see a comment field, you can comment your question there. And we'll be we'll be happy to be able to respond to those if you would like a response. Also on ProductivityCast dotnet. On each of those episode pages, you will find our show notes. They have links to anything we've discussed so that you can easily jump to them from there. Also, we have text transcripts. If you see the little read more button on the page, you can click the Read more, it'll expand the transcript it's machine generated, but it should be good enough for you to be able to listen and read along. You can also download it click on the download link and you can download it as a PDF for offline note taking. And otherwise, you could throw that into your note taking tool of choice for you know marking it up or you can print it or other otherwise, but it is there so know that they you do have those options as well. If you have a topic about personal productivity you'd like us to discuss on a future cast, feel free to visit ProductivityCast dotnet forward slash contact, you can leave a voice recorded message where you can type a message and maybe we'll feature you on a future episode. I want to express my thanks to Augusto Pinaud Francis Wade, and art Gelwicks for joining me here on ProductivityCast. Each week, you can learn more about them and their work by visiting ProductivityCast dotnet and clicking on the about page. I'm Ray Sidney-Smith and on behalf of all of us here at ProductivityCast Here's your productive life.



**Voiceover Artist 53:21**

That's it for this productivity cast, the weekly show about all things productivity with your hosts Ray Sidney-Smith and a Gousto pinout with Francis Wade and art Gelwicks