Six Must-Haves When Using Microsoft Teams for Incident Management

A comparison of functionality between Opsgenie, PagerDuty and VictorOps

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Introduction

Over the last few years, teams have realized the benefits of sharing and distributing knowledge in chat applications such as Microsoft Teams. Today, teams are extending the use of these applications beyond collaboration by embracing ChatOps. ChatOps empowers teams by bringing complex day-to-day operational work into shared chat channels. If done correctly it drastically reduces context switching and increases the speed at which teams can tackle tough challenges.

Companies are realizing incredible benefits by incorporating ChatOps into their incident management workflows. Microsoft Teams channels provide hyper-effective means to alert teams of issues, take immediate action, and collaborate with clarity and urgency. It is for this reason that companies like Opsgenie, PagerDuty, and VictorOps have invested in integrating their incidentmanagement applications into MS Teams.

Ideally, users of a modern incident management solution need to have access to a multitude of features so that they can address specific challenges directly within the chat tool. During an incident, switching between applications to access and collaborate on the actionable data is a waste of time. Keeping the conversation and action in one place, where team members already are, is the key to a fast and successful incident resolution process. That is why ChatOps has emerged as an alternative to the war room concept.
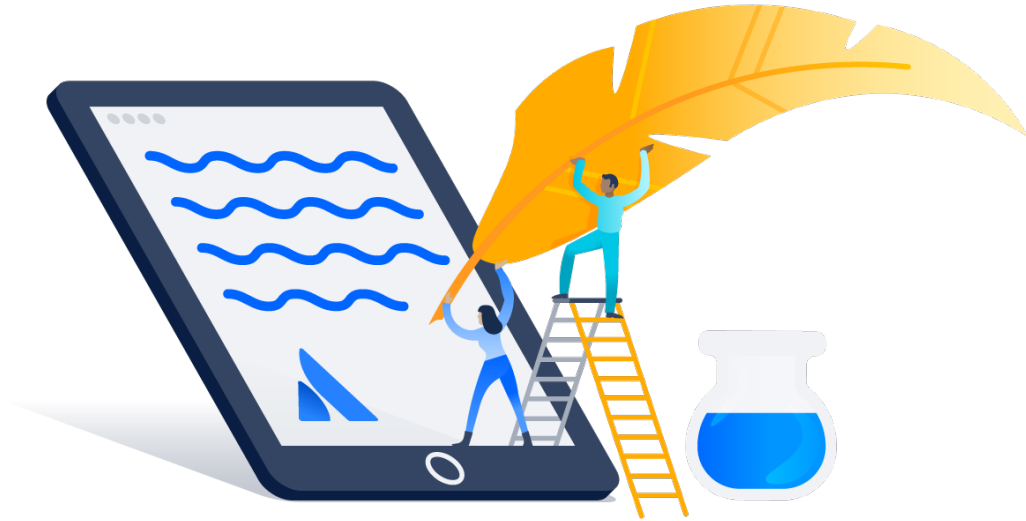
A NOTE ABOUT OUR ANALYSIS

Opsgenie™, PagerDuty® and VictorOps® have Microsoft Teams applications, for good reason, as Microsoft Teams is one of the fastest growing applications in team collaboration.

In this part, we compare the Microsoft Teams applications considering the six important features we described below. Each feature has one or more items corresponding to MS Teams' capabilities.

VictorOps has a native chat client as part of the product. While VictorOps prefers to bring its users to the product to collaborate and work on the incidents, Opsgenie and PagerDuty prefer to fully integrate with tools like Slack, HipChat, and Microsoft Teams. Opsgenie aims to bring all its functionality into the chat application where the whole team already works.

1. Post Messages with Clarity

The basic requirement for integrating any application within chat tools such as Microsoft Teams is to simply have messages posted within chat channels. However, there are three additional needs to consider when integrating an incident management tool into chat when increasing efficiency is the goal.

- The integration must be able to post chat messages regardless where the incident originates and additional information is added (monitoring, ticketing, or collaboration tools).
- Messages need to be customized based on the specifics or severity of the incident. Often the basic message needs to be appended with tags or additional information fields.
- It is often advantageous to have messages accompanied by buttons which allow responders to take instant, prescriptive actions.

Opsgenie can send alert and incident action notifications to Microsoft Teams. You can choose which actions to receive using the action mapping feature.

PagerDuty can send incident action notifications to Microsoft Teams.

VictorOps can send incident action notifications, on-call shift changes, and user notifications into a Microsoft Teams channel.

	Opsgenie	PagerDuty	VictorOps
Send Incident Notifications	YES	YES	YES
Send on-call shift change notifications	NO	NO	YES
Ability to customize the chat message	PARTIALLY	NO	NO

2. Control How Information is Shared

Posting every alert and comment into a shared channel can quickly become overwhelming and is considered bad practice. A strong integration enables the creation of separate channels for specific responders and have direct control over what types of alert and follow-up messages are shown.

A seamless integration also provides the flexibility to receive only the incident actions which are decidedly relevant. Low priority issues that don't require immediate action can be filtered and not sent to the chat stream, ensuring the team stays focused on what really matters.

Opsgenie allows you to add more than one Microsoft Teams application to dierent channels. You can install and configure applications for each team or service you have. You receive the actions you want, such as acknowledge, add note, close, or all other available actions. You can also filter alerts and incidents for each property by checking if one or more specified conditions are met. Only the alerts that match your conditions are sent to the channel.

PagerDuty allows you to add more than one Microsoft Teams application for each service. You receive all incident actions in the room. You can't filter incidents by checking if conditions are met at the integration level.

VictorOps allows you to install one application for the account. You can't install applications for each team or service. You can't choose which incident actions are sent to the room but you can choose to receive notifications for all incident actions, shift change notifications, or paging notifications. You can't filter incidents by checking if conditions are met at the integration level.

	Opsgenie	PagerDuty	VictorOps
Team/Service based installations	YES	YES	NO
Ability to configure which actions are sent to the room	YES	NO	PARTIALLY
Ability to filter the alerts/ incidents based on the properties	YES	NO	NO

3. Accelerate Actions

ChatOps transforms Microsoft Teams into a vehicle in which users take actions and deploy solutions. This virtually eliminates the need for operations teams to switch between applications when responding to an incident.

Most integrations enable users to execute incident actions using text commands. This method is valid and often preferred. However, deeper integrations simplify tasks by providing interactive buttons allowing users to start working on incidents with just a click.

The value of responding to an alert by clicking a button extends beyond simple alert acknowledgement. Enabling all common responses (i.e. assigning an alert, taking ownership, adding notes, muting incidents, etc.) to be executed in this manner accelerates resolution and unlocks the real power of ChatOps.

Opsgenie's Microsoft Teams application supports buttons for most used actions like acknowledge, close, snooze and add note. You can also use the /genie command to execute all kinds of actions from the chat interface.

PagerDuty and VictorOps do not support executing actions from Microsoft Teams (Not counting the Microsoft Team's tabs as they are similar to browser tabs and considered as bad practice to execute actions).

	Opsgenie	PagerDuty	VictorOps
Execute incident actions using buttons	YES	NO	NO
Execute incident actions using Slash commands	YES	NO	NO
Execute configuration actions (on-call scheduling and integrationadministration, etc) using Slash commands	YES	NO	NO

4. Instantly Retrieve Supporting Information

A challenge of a long chat thread is that critical information can get lost within the communications or additional information may be needed. A user might have to leave Microsoft Teams to look up important details and related information. For example, they may wish to look at other open incidents or list current alert policies.

The integration of an incident management system into the chat environment needs to allow users to access supporting information at any time. The ability to query not only additional details about a specific incident but also general information regarding on-call schedules and alert policies is a requirement. By empowering team members to access this data directly within the chat interface, they stay focused and are able to respond in the most efficient manner possible.

> Opsgenie supports listing all your alerts and their details using the slash command.
>
> PagerDuty and VictorOps don't support this.

	Opsgenie	PagerDuty	VictorOps
View & List incident details in the channel	YES	YES	NO
View supporting information (such as integrations/policies) in the channel	YES	YES	NO

5. Create New Alerts

A common task when managing an incident is to create manual alerts. Again, requiring people to switch applications in order to complete this task is a distraction and slows the progress.

Creating new alerts for a team or service right within the chat channel is a necessity. The incident management system then notifies the person on-call automatically. Having the ability to create an alert directly within Microsoft Teams empowers individuals that may not have direct access to the incident management system to report problems efficiently.

> Opsgenie's built-in slash command (/genie) supports creating new incidents. You can choose teams or recipients if you want.
>
> PagerDuty and VictorOps don't support these features.

	Opsgenie	PagerDuty	VictorOps
Create an incident from the channel	YES	NO	NO
Create an incident for specific teams or recipients	YES	NO	NO

6. Control Access

When an incident occurs, it is important that corrective action is taken by only the people who are authorized to respond. Mapping (or linking) the chat users to the users within the incident management system enables this level of control.

Linking the user profiles between the chat and incident management has additional benefits. As alerts are acknowledged and responded to within the chat environment, the events are recorded within the incident management solution. A clear history describing who took each action is recorded for future reporting and analysis.

Opsgenie gives you the ability to optionally link Microsoft Teams and their users. Unlinked users can also operate on the incident. This option is provided in the configuration and is up to the user. Users can also undo the action themselves.

PagerDuty and VictorOps don't support this.

	Opsgenie	PagerDuty	VictorOps
Link chat users with the product's users	YES	NO	NO
Unlink chat users with the product's users	YES	NO	NO
Optional linking/sync	YES	NO	NO

While there are many things to consider when integrating incident management into a chat application, the benefits are clear. Response time, ability to collaborate, and team access to incident details are crucial factors for incident resolution. Opsgenie has the most benefits providing clarity, control, rapid response, access to incident details, and flexible configuration all within a Microsoft Teams channel.