Why Can't UC and Network Teams Get Along?

In most organizations, the conversion to VoIP has already happened. Dealing with VoIP problems is now the responsibility of the UC *and* network operation teams. A common refrain from either side is this: Why can't Network and UC get along? This issue has very little to do with technical issues and far more to do with the business goals of the two groups.

Network and UC teams have different focuses and goals that are rarely aligned to support each other. As a result, a rift forms between the folks responsible for the network versus those responsible for the VoIP phone system—even when they are on the same team. This gets worse if the network and UC individuals have goals that are not aligned with their team's goals or have personal goals that get in the way of business goals. The key is to ensure that all the goals, at every level, align. Here's a checklist for doing this:

- Ensure that teams goals are clearly defined and not in conflict with each other.
- Make sure that team member goals do not conflict with team goals.
- Understand that subconscious goals may subvert all other goals and have a plan in place to address this.
- Beware of mixed messages in goal setting so that priorities are clear.
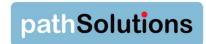
Watch Out for Diverging Team Goals

Any organization that is responsible for UC and the network is focused on the goal of providing a reliable and stable service. While this goal seems pretty straightforward, in reality it's not.

The UC team is usually focused on "providing voice and video services to the organization that is reliable, stable, and cost-efficient." In this case, the definitions of "reliable" and "stable" are viewed through the eyes of a user (or customer) of the service: "The VoIP service is reliable if my calls are not dropped." In turn, videoconferencing is considered stable if "I don't miss any parts of a conversation and don't have any screen artifacts on the video portion."

In contrast, the network team is focused on "providing reliable, stable, and cost-efficient connectivity to the organization." For the network team, *reliable* is measured as uptime being more than 99.999% and *stable* is viewed through the same five-nines paradigm.

So although telecom and network teams strive to provide stable and reliable service, how they go about achieving this goal is very different. For example, most network teams have no concerns about latency, jitter, or out-of-order packets in the network and yet the UC team lives or dies by these metrics. In this case, goals, with the accompanying metrics to define stability and reliability for both teams, need to be aligned. It's clear that VoIP call quality is dependent on far more than the network's five-nines—latency, jitter, and out-of-order packets must also be evaluated and the network team's goals should reflect this. For example, round-trip latency

must be less than 100ms, jitter less than 30ms, and loss less than 1%. (For Microsoft's Skype for Business network requirements, go here.)

Align Individual Goals with Team Goals

Individuals may also have goals that don't align with their team goals. For example, the team goal is to meet the five-nines of network stability, but the individual's goal is to reduce the number of network-related trouble tickets by 25%. In this case, the team member may try to cut corners to meet their ticket reduction goal with network stability suffering as a result.

Beware of "Subconscious" Individual Goals

Managers should also be aware of an engineer's subconscious goals: These are the goals that team members are looking to achieve that are not aligned with the team's or organization's goals. "It's not my fault," is a common trap one can fall into. For example: A telecom team is having call quality problems reported to them by their users and they ask the network team to investigate. The network member may automatically say that "it's not the network" because they don't want their "stable and reliable" network to be the cause of UC's problem. At this point, you're fighting against the pride of the employee who feels that they're doing a great job even if there are problems in the network causing call quality issues while still meeting the five-nines goal.
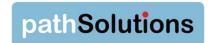
To alleviate subconscious goals conflicting with other goals, institute a troubleshooting methodology. That way, the focus in always on discovering what the problem is and fixing it—no blame here, just figure out why the problem is occurring.

Ensure that All Organizational and Business Goals Align

Sometimes goals can be in conflict of one another. For example, if management prints up flyers all over the data center that "five-nines is the goal," but at the same time, trim budgets and headcount, they are sending a mixed message. In this case, five-nines is not the primary goal, the budget is. Which goal is more important?

The entire tone of an organization can be changed rapidly if goals are aligned. But it's up to management to make sure that the team and individual goals align and support each other. After all, the primary goal of running a business unit is ensuring that it's profitable and the best way to do this is to align business goals.

So Why Can't Network and UC Get Along?

In my opinion, network and UC teams often get a bad rap for not getting along. In reality, they are often marching in different directions because their goals are not aligned. The good news here is that the entire tone of an organization can be changed rapidly if the goals are lined up. But it's up to management to make sure that the team and individual goals align and support each other. After all, the primary goal of running a business unit is ensuring that it's profitable and the best way to do this is to align all your business goals.