

# Five keys to mastering today's communications domain

Capabilities needed to anticipate events, control outcomes and lead with a steady hand



IT leaders are buffeted by a variety of forces coming at them from all directions. Typical are the day-to-day distractions such as budget constraints, legal and regulatory requirements, the demands of internal corporate governance, and human resource issues.

But beyond these daily concerns is the larger context within which the IT executive must steer a steady course if he or she is to master the communications component of the IT domain. On one side are the demands of the user organizations or business units that IT serves — that is, its customers. On the other is the fast-paced, often tumultuous world of technological change that IT must tame on behalf of its users.

Mastering the communications domain requires coming to terms with and achieving proficiency in a number of key aspects of the environment. Technical knowledge is certainly a critical foundation to build on, but it is only one of several factors that allow the IT executive to anticipate events, to control

outcomes and to lead instead of being driven by the winds of change.

Now more than ever before, business users are clamoring for the deployment of consumer-oriented technologies such as smartphones, tablet PCs and others. The hard-and-fast boundaries between work and home devices and applications are quickly evaporating. The IT department must navigate a course that will incorporate exciting new technologies — those so-called disruptive technologies — that effectively achieve the corporate vision without disrupting the forward march of the organization.

Over the six years that George Humphrey has been director of Global Strategy and Product Line Management in Avaya Operations

Services (AOS), he has helped many IT departments and their executives maintain a balanced and forward-thinking approach to their organizations' communications needs. George has seen firsthand the critical factors that must be addressed if an IT executive is to master the communications domain. In this white paper, George shares insights he has gained over the years.

**George, based on your experience, what are the most critical components of communications that the IT executive needs to master?**

If you were to pose that question to IT executives, I would expect that most would say the technical knowledge of their staff is of primary importance, but I'm going to treat that as a given.

Most IT professionals are very smart, and they have a lot of technical knowledge. But there are a number of other capabilities that are just as essential, so I'd say that training and talent management are foundational aspects of IT if you're going to master the communications domain. But the thing about training and talent management is that they aren't static states. The IT staff never reaches the state where it is fully trained. It's always "in training" because there's always something new to learn. It could be the latest video standard or SIP-based protocol, but there's always something. Right now, for example, we see an influx of consumer-centric devices being used by employees to access critical enterprise data. IT departments are having to assess these and decide whether or not to support them — and if they are going to support them, they need to staff accordingly. That's where talent management comes into the picture. Effective talent management means having the right talent in the right place at the right time. This means adjusting to the changing needs of the business units and shifting, adding and rationalizing talent to meet those needs. So part of training and talent management is always assessing how trained your staff is, what are

the most critical technologies that they have to learn next and whether you have them deployed most effectively. This takes a degree of introspection and foresight.

**With training and talent management as a foundation, what are some of the other key areas that the IT executive needs to build on?**

Next you have to make sure your staff can take advantage of the knowledge it has gained through training, and that means that they have to have the right tools to use on an effective and efficient communications infrastructure. Today's communications domains often include equipment and software from many different vendors. You have to ask yourself, does my IT staff have not only the right tools to deal with all of the discordant voices in our communications environment — all of those devices and software from different suppliers — but also are we able to bridge those in a way that they work together? By asking those sorts of questions, the IT executive starts to identify the tools, operational facilities, such as network operating centers, and other aspects of the infrastructure that need to be procured, built-out and staffed by talented and fully trained staff.

**You mentioned tools, George — are there certain types of tools that are particularly important?**

Yes, because today's communications environments are changing so rapidly, monitoring and analysis tools are extremely important. Without them, it's almost impossible to understand what's happening. I use the analogy of pipes vs. arteries to explain how some legacy monitoring and analysis tools don't get the job done anymore. Those legacy tools treat communications channels as though they are pipes, and therefore the IT department is relegated to being a plumber who is responsible for making sure the water keeps flowing. The tools don't monitor the quality of the water, where it's coming from, where it's going, whether there are bottlenecks building up somewhere and so on. Modern monitoring and analysis tools treat the communications network more like a living, breathing organism. Communications flow through the arteries and veins, and IT is more like a doctor who oversees not just the health of the organism at any one point in time, but also plans an effective growth path into the future.

## Master or be mastered?

Adopting disruptive technology doesn't necessarily mean disrupting the organization. Two competing firms recently set about adopting unified communications-based (UC) video capabilities across their companies and among strategic customers. The first jumped in with both feet — PCs were quickly equipped with webcams and connected to several dozen telepresence rooms. The resulting video traffic — a huge increase almost overnight — nearly crashed internal networks. The firm had to back off its plans.

The second firm adopted a carefully planned, well-thought-out approach that leveraged the work of managed service providers and external counselors. It weighed all aspects of the deployment, giving due consideration to its potential benefits, as well as to possible pitfalls and unintended consequences. This approach — which took about the same amount of time but included far more upfront planning — succeeded, and the firm is enjoying a healthy ROI on its new video communications capabilities.

Today's monitoring and analysis tools can be categorized into four different types. These are:

- **Reactive.** Something has happened and it requires a fix.
- **Proactive or real time.** Here is the level of activity, such as packet loss, jitter, echo, latency and delay, all those sorts of things, that is taking place right now on your network.
- **Predictive.** Based on monitoring and analysis of what has been happening on the network over a period of time, certain conditions are likely to occur in the foreseeable future. Predictive monitoring may also include tools that synthetically analyze the network environment and relay information about its ongoing health, with notification of any real-time changes or impacts on the environment before a call is even made.
- **Historical.** Let's take a look back at the way this organic communications environment has functioned and determine whether there's a better way to do something so we can get a better ROI on our equipment, our tools and our people.

**After the training program is up and running, the tools and infrastructure have been put in place, and the network is being monitored and analyzed properly, what's left to do?**

Actually, there are a couple of additional key competencies that really set the top-notch IT departments apart from the rest, but these can be a bit more obtuse and harder to get your arms around. First, I'd say that it's critical to align IT as a service organization that anticipates the requirements of the user organizations it serves. That sounds pretty obvious, but what I mean is that IT has to understand the business units and what they are all about — what they are trying to achieve and why — almost as well as the business units understand themselves. That means getting an insider's perspective. When you have that, you begin to understand where they are going, why they want to go there and how you can help them.

The last key aspect of mastering the communications domain is more abstract, but it too is very important. This is the frame of mind or attitude of IT executives concerning change. Change is one of those things that everyone talks of, but no one does anything about it because that's the point. You can't do anything

about change in the sense that you can't stop it, or slow it down, or alter it substantially. Especially in a technology-driven field such as IT, constant change is a fact of life. We can't go into denial about change and try to stop it in its tracks.

But to say that IT executives need to embrace change is not quite right either. Embracing change simply for the sake of change could lead you over the cliff. There's a dark side at both ends of the spectrum. What I believe you have to do is embrace change in an informed and cautious way — trust, but verify. This requires constant and brutally honest introspection. When you see a hole that needs to be filled or a deficiency of some sort, have the courage to realize that it's a good thing you've recognized it because the organization is going to get stronger as a result. And one more thing: it's another sign of the maturity of the executive and the organization when they are able to turn to the most effective source for solutions without getting hung up on ancillary issues such as protecting one's turf or other petty concerns.

### Any final thoughts, George?

To sum up, I'd say that mastering anything — in this case we've been

talking about communications — typically involves steering a middle course. It's the old idea of the Golden Mean, which is important because if you stray too far one way or the other you're going to get off course sooner than you might realize. It's a lot harder to get back on course than it is to stay on course.

For example, IT doesn't want to be too quick to adopt every new technology fad that comes down the pike, but it does want to take the lead with new technology adoption on behalf of its users. It's a delicate balance, and the best way to achieve it is to step back and assess how things are going in an objective and detached way. IT executives have to insert some distance between themselves and what's going on around them. This can be hard to do because we have so much invested emotionally and intellectually into what we're doing. So having those internal and external counselors and advisers who can help achieve an in-depth yet objective perspective is very important.

### About the author

George Humphrey is director of Global Strategy and Product Line Management in Avaya Operations Services (AOS). In this role, he helps



IT departments and their executives maintain a balanced and forward-thinking approach to their organizations' communications needs.

### Avaya Operations Services

As a global leader in enterprise communications systems, Avaya helps customers achieve their meaningful business results by designing, building and managing their communications networks. Avaya Operations Services, simply put, enables our clients to fully realize the potential of their communications infrastructure and applications. We deliver this critical operational support through our team of experts and proven processes and tools. Our customers are then free to focus on what they do best and leave the rest to Avaya.



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