Preparing for Innovation: Understanding How IT Organizational Change Can Help Drive Success with Unified Communications

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Introduction

Over the past year, Microsoft and associated research companies have interviewed hundreds of technology professionals at organizations around the world that are either preparing to deploy or in the midst of deploying Unified Communications (UC). From these discussions, a picture has emerged of the far-reaching impact of UC on the structure of the IT organization, how this affects evaluation and preparation for deployment, and how the resulting changes in IT’s structure may be leveraged to promote increased efficiency, collaboration, and employee satisfaction.

After briefly reviewing the nature of Unified Communications, why organizations choose to deploy it, and the purchase decision process, this white paper describes the organizational impact of UC experienced by the companies surveyed. Because virtually everyone in the IT department has a role to play in UC evaluation and deployment, the paper then reviews organization roles, with special attention to the “integrator” roles that are critical to the process of breaking down communications silos that is fundamental to UC deployment. The paper concludes with a brief description of the basic strategy and tactics for getting started with Microsoft Unified Communications, again based on the experience of the companies surveyed, and concludes with a list of resources to help you evaluate, plan, deploy, and manage your UC implementation.

Unification and Change

SIDEBAR NOTE: Companies intending to deploy Unified Communications face two fundamental decisions: which unification model to use, network- or software-centric, and how to use UC's organizational impact on the IT department to promote increased efficiency, collaboration, and employee satisfaction.

Unified Communications (UC) breaks down traditional communication silos, combining voice, email, instant messaging, and audio-video-web conferencing, plus real-time availability information ("presence"), into a system that streamlines communications between organizations and people. By integrating communications with business applications, it enables people to communicate directly from the context of their tasks and quickly contact the right person using the more effective method, thus increasing productivity and reducing "time-to-decision." And the increased integration offered by UC can reduce infrastructure cost and simplify administration.

However, organizations looking to adopt UC face two challenges in particular. First, there's a good deal of confusion about the best way to unify all the different technologies involved. There are two basic models: network-centric and software-centric. Network-centric Unified Communications is characterized by end points that are dedicated appliances (e.g., IP phones) dependent for their functionality on a tightly-managed "smart" network. In this model, communications applications reside in and depend on a single, secure network with extensive Quality of Service (QoS) mechanisms on all links.

By contrast, in a software-centric UC implementation, the end-points are commodity hardware running multi-function software across any network, independent of (although capable of using) any QoS mechanisms or other "smart" network functions. Each model has, of course, its own particular advantages and disadvantages. One significant difference is that they require different evaluation processes. In this white paper, we discuss the evaluation process for the software-centric model, which is the basis of Microsoft Unified Communications.

Second, Unified Communications by its very nature cuts across many technological and management domains within the enterprise. As a result, the organizational impact of a successful UC deployment can be substantial, and this is the primary focus of this white paper.

Handled properly, the structural changes to the IT organization that UC brings about can be an opportunity for enhanced efficiency and cooperation, and a career boost for many on the team. As with the evaluation process, the choice of UC model greatly influences the optimal organizational structure, and this white paper discusses the structures used by companies preparing to deploy UC.

Microsoft and Unified Communications

SIDEBAR NOTE: Microsoft Unified Communications brings together a broad portfolio of communications functions through shared services

According to Gartner, Inc.[1], Unified Communications solutions often take one of three general approaches:

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[1] *Magic Quadrant for Unified Communications, 2007*, Bern Elliot, August 20, 2007 (Gartner RAS Core Research Note G00150273. The Magic Quadrant is copyrighted August 20, 2007 by Gartner, Inc. and is reused with permission.

- *"One is to bundle most functionality tightly in a single solution; examples of this include Nortel's Multimedia Communication Server (MCS) 5100, Siemens' OpenScape, and Interactive Intelligence's Customer Interaction Center (CIC) products.*
- *"A second approach is to take a broad portfolio of separate communication functions and tie them together through shared services, such as presence, administration and directories. Examples of this include Cisco and Microsoft solutions.*
- *"A third approach is to offer a common communication framework, or middleware, that can be used by unrelated communication applications. IBM and Oracle are taking this approach."*

Microsoft has taken the second approach, providing a comprehensive set of clients, servers, services, and devices that deliver e-mail/calendaring, mobile messaging/device management, unified messaging, presence/instant message, VoIP call management, and audio-video-web conferencing. This empowers end-users with a familiar set of tools built on an enterprise-ready, scalable and easily-managed software-powered architecture.

According to Wainhouse Research,

> *Microsoft offers a full suite of software products complemented with conferencing services to enable geographically distributed teams, mobile workers and teleworkers to communicate and collaborate in the context they prefer. The suite is designed as an integrated offering that is designed to seamlessly augment Microsoft products that already may be deployed, and provide all of the unique needs required to work effectively from anywhere at anytime.*
>
> - *Secure access to email – Microsoft Outlook 2007 and Microsoft Exchange Server 2007 provide end-to-end encryption – server to client – thus eliminating the hassle and expense of supporting and configuring a VPN. To guard against data loss, Exchange can maintain a complete copy of each user's email messages on the server, and automatically manage the synchronization of email between different PCs (office, laptop, home, etc). For reading email on-the-go, Exchange includes Outlook Web Access for secure access to email via any PC with a web browser and Internet connection.*
> - *Business-quality VoIP telephony with integrated IM and Presence – Microsoft Office Communication Server (OCS) provides two key capabilities for the remote worker. Using Voice over IP technology, OCS effectively replaces and/or extends the worker's office phone though the use of a headset connected to the PC and a software-based phone application. All voice traffic is encrypted and securely sent via the same Internet connection used for data access. The operation of the phone, including sending and receiving phone calls, is exactly the same as if in the office. OCS additionally provides Instant Messaging and Presence, which is the lifeline of the remote worker. Presence, which is pervasive across all Microsoft applications, indicates when the worker is available to collaborate with colleagues; Instant Messaging not only includes text-based chat, but can be escalated with a click of the mouse to add voice, video, and desktop sharing.*

- *Web and videoconferencing – Microsoft Office Live Meeting enables collaboration with colleagues, customers, and partners in real time, between either individuals or large groups. Dedicated features are specifically designed for giving presentations, collaborating on a whiteboard, and editing documents. Videoconferencing with a conference room of colleagues using Live Meeting and Microsoft Roundtable allows Teleworkers to see everyone a 360° view of in the room – adding a richer context for communicating and exchanging ideas.*
- *Team Workspace and Document Repository – Microsoft Office SharePoint Server manages an organization's content and enables team collaboration. Documents can be securely accessed by any team*[2]

Unified Communications Purchase Drivers and Process

SIDEBAR NOTE: There are many purchase drivers for Unified Communications, but a business case is critical for gaining buy-in.

The Unified Communications purchase process may be launched by either IT decision makers or business decision makers, and it may start from the top down or from the bottom up. Regardless of the source of the initiative, a business case is critical for gaining buy-in.

IT Organization Purchase Drivers

The common imperative for all IT organizations is to deliver the most value to the rest of the organization with the leanest staff possible. As one IT manager interviewed put it, "In five years my prediction would be that we will be running a third to fifty percent more applications than we are today and we will be doing it with a third to fifty percent less people…." But IT managers are growing increasingly uncertain about where future cost reductions will come from. The Microsoft approach to Unified Communications, which lets them leverage much of their existing infrastructure and skill sets, promises to deliver the continuing cost reductions they seek by simplifying the deployment and management of their communications infrastructure to make IT operations more efficient.

However, the proximate trigger for UC deployment is not often due to such strategic considerations, which tend to be a backdrop to more pressing, tactical concerns. These include factors such as various kinds of performance degradation (e.g., voice mailbox capacity, email server downtime), company growth or structural change (e.g., moving to a new location, opening branch offices), or external forces such as end of license or support contracts or new software releases, all of which may help launch a UC project.

Business Organization Purchase Drivers

The business organization looks to UC for increased revenue and decreased costs. Revenue increases are expected from improvements in productivity, reduction in project completion time, improved sales processes, and increased customer loyalty. Expected cost reductions include lower telephony, travel and training costs, a reduced cost of sales, lower total cost of ownership, and improved compliance.

Proximate business triggers may include a desire for greater mobility, enhanced conferencing capabilities (often driven by travel cost considerations as much as by a desire for more efficiency), or improved connectivity with an important client. An

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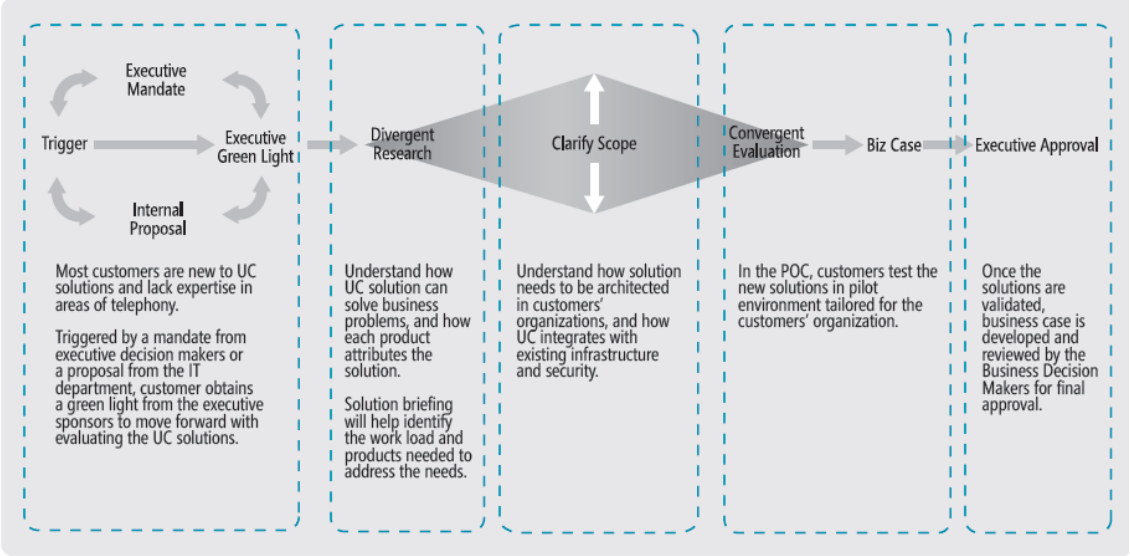
[2] Wainhouse Research, LLC, *Addressing the Challenges Facing the Distributed, 21st Century Business Through Telework*, June 2008.

understanding of these motivations on the part of IT decision makers can aid in finding allies among business units for moving a UC project forward.[3]

A Model of the UC Purchase Process

Although the purchase process for Unified Communications varies widely among companies, a general model emerged from Microsoft's discussions with companies around the world.



The primary subjects of this white paper—the changes in organizational structure needed to make the most of UC and the makeup of evaluation and deployment teams—will help you during the scope clarification phase and the convergent evaluation phase (POC).

The Organizational Impact of UC in Large Organizations

SIDEBAR NOTE: Because Unified Communications breaks down communications silos, it has far-reaching effects on the structure of the IT organization.

Due to the cross-functional nature of Unified Communications, successful implementation is likely to result in numerous organizational changes. From the research emerged a picture of four different management structures based on an organization's trajectory to UC and the place of Microsoft Office Communications Server (OCS) in its VoIP implementation:

- Traditional (pre-VoIP)
- Network-centric VoIP (pre-UC)
- Microsoft UC and OCS-based VoIP
- Microsoft UC and network-centric VoIP

The Traditional IT Organizational Structure

In the traditional IT organization, before VoIP, the analog PBX group was separate from the IT organization, often part of the Facilities department. And, of course, the network and server teams were separate.

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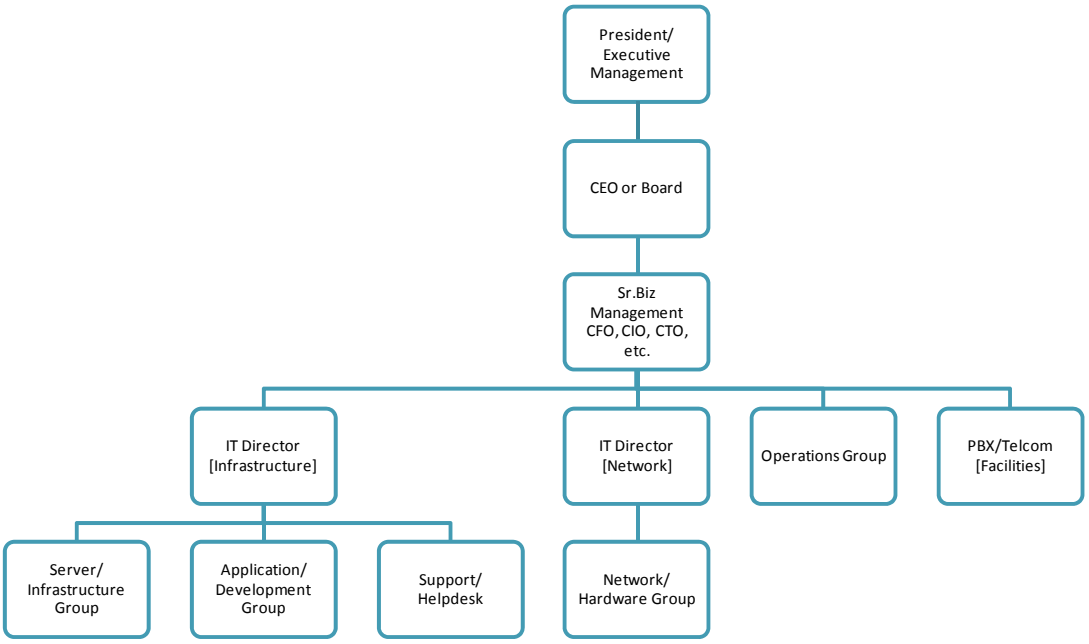
[3] For more information on UC purchase drivers, please refer to *The Total Economic Impact™ Of Microsoft Unified Communications Products and Services*, Forrester Consulting, October 2007

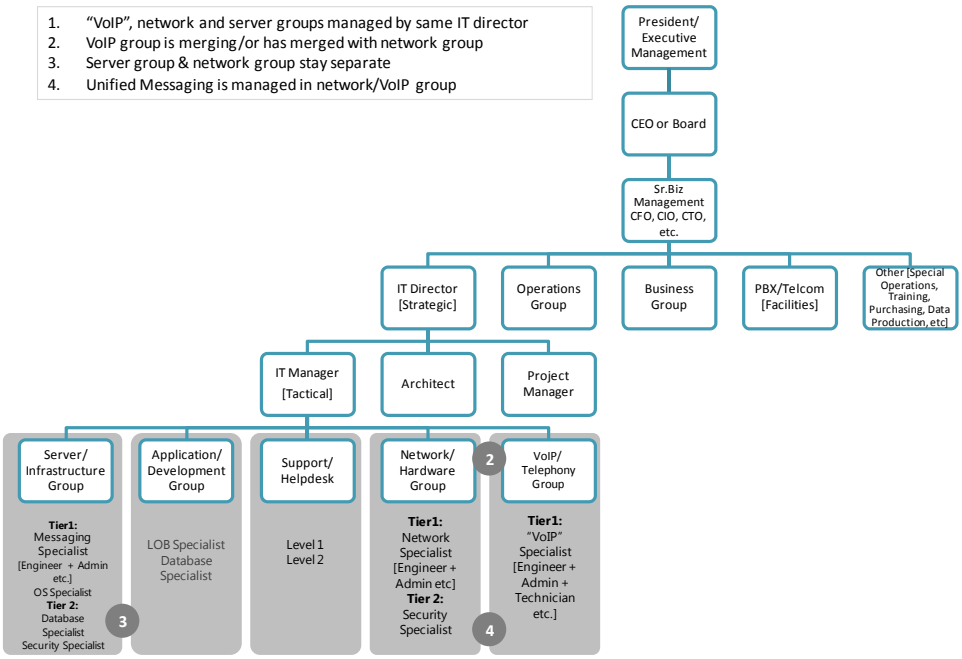
1. Network and server groups were managed by different IT heads
2. Analog PBX group was separate from IT org



The IT Organization for Network-Centric VoIP

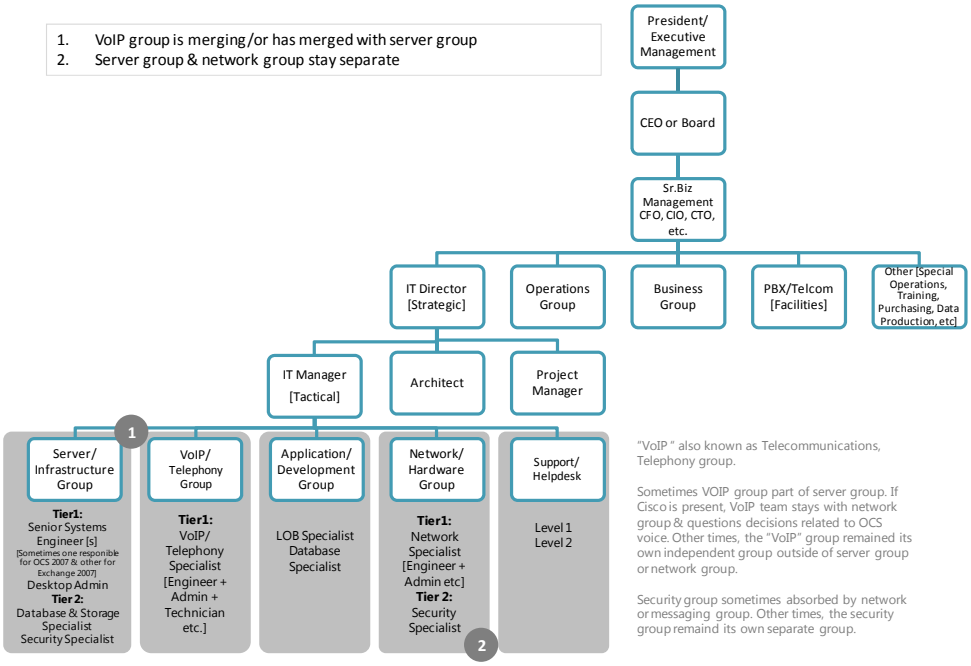
In those organizations that have adopted network-centric VoIP, the VoIP, network, and server groups are managed by the same IT director. The VoIP group is merging (or has merged) with the network group, but the server and network groups stay separate.

1. "VoIP", network and server groups managed by same IT director
2. VoIP group is merging/or has merged with network group
3. Server group & network group stay separate
4. Unified Messaging is managed in network/VoIP group



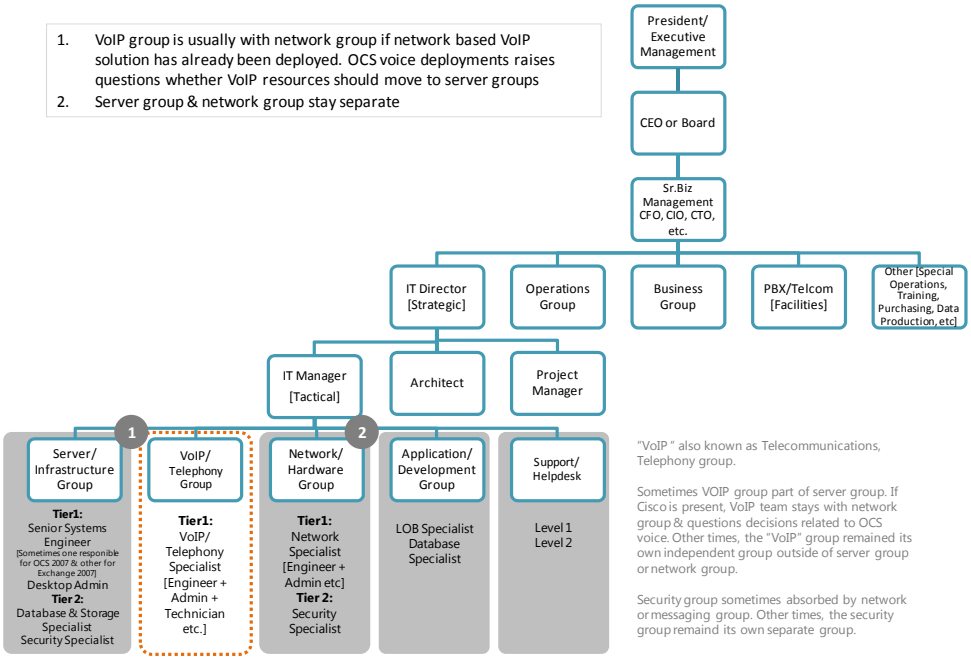
The IT Organization with Microsoft UC and OCS-Based VoIP

In early-adopter organizations that base their VoIP on Office Communications Server, the VoIP group is merging or has merged with the server group, which remains separate from the network group. In companies where there is already some network-centric VoIP, the VoIP team may resist merging with the server team, and either remain with the network team, or form its own organization.



The IT Organization with Microsoft UC and Network-Centric VoIP

In those organizations where there was already an extensive network-centric VoIP deployment prior to the adoption of Unified Communications, the VoIP group is usually with the network group. Naturally, in such a case, OCS voice deployment necessitates a decision about whether or not to move VoIP resources to the server group, where the necessary Microsoft-oriented skills and knowledge exist. In any case, the server group and the network group remain separate.



The Impact of Unified Communications on Support

UC deployment tends to accelerate the existing trend to cross-functionality in Tier 2 support. They need to have broad-based knowledge of both IP telephony and network and server issues, and the possible interaction between them, to provide quality service. As one help desk manager noted, “A broad knowledge base is more important than knowing the specific apps we use.”

Tier 1 support may also experience more calls from users as Unified Communications gains traction in the company. More skilled staff, improved tools, and, perhaps most important, better visibility into the troubleshooting process are necessities.

Upward Mobility and Staff Satisfaction

As customers interviewed noted, the way in which the organizational changes that come with Unified Communications are presented, and the support given to individuals impacted, are critical to success. You can create a positive outcome by emphasizing the collaborative, team-oriented nature of the transition. Creating a Unified Communications team will bring together a diverse group of individuals from different technology silos who are not accustomed to working together. But, given staff with a common dedication to and enjoyment of learning new skills and surmounting new challenges, the various projects involved can give everyone a shared goal and an opportunity to get to know each other on a personal level. The intellectual ferment this creates is good at all levels of the organization, as it helps people identify co-workers and managers who can help them rise to their most effective level.

Because promoting internal candidates is almost always easier than seeking out new hires, a dedication to upward mobility for staff at all levels is an important part of a Unified Communications strategy. Companies interviewed were on the lookout for individuals with a desire to go beyond reactive problem-solving, who enjoyed learning and applying their knowledge in new ways. Beyond just technical knowledge, managers should look for “soft skills” such as good, interpersonal communications, charisma, and the ability to talk about technology in terms that other can understand easily. One weakness that surfaced was a concentration on technical training at the expense of

training aimed at these important soft skills, so it's worth considering the balance of technical and communications training offered.

However, it's worth noting that many individuals interviewed were happy in their current roles, and saw their opportunity not in upward mobility but in applying new skills to interesting new challenges.

Finally, keep the emphasis on face-to-face, interactive, top-down knowledge transfer. Since the impetus for UC often comes from the top of the technical team—the IT director or senior architect—this is very often a quite natural, even organic process that emerges naturally from the way the IT organization adapts to the new challenge. But, given what Unified Communications is designed to do, it should be no surprise that interactive training based on small groups or webinars is usually the best way to go about bringing everyone up to speed. And keep it largely informal and on-the-job. No one has enough time in IT these days, so training should be designed to fit into their schedules as easily as possible, with an emphasis on hands-on training.

Organizational Roles in Microsoft Unified Communications

SIDEBAR NOTE: Everyone in the IT organization has a role to play in Unified Communications evaluation and preparation for deployment, and for many, it will be an opportunity for upward mobility or the development of new and valuable skills.

Although the main thrust of a Microsoft UC deployment tends to be owned by the server team, everyone in the IT organization has a role to play. In this section, we'll look at the various IT roles involved in evaluation and deployment.

It should be noted that because of the rapid pace of change in most IT organizations, titles tend to have little meaning; in fact, in the survey, many participants would give their formal title and quickly follow with their "real" title. Thus, the titles listed below are simply offered as a guide to the level of participation of a given role.

Key Roles in Evaluation and Deployment

The two top key roles are on the business side:

- A C-level or executive-level sponsor
- At least one business group executive sponsor

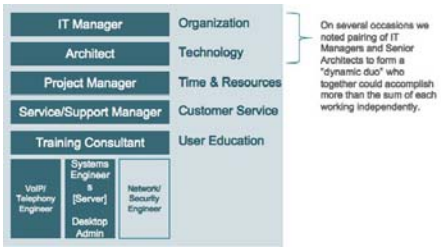
Pay attention to the triggers for the latter (e.g., enhanced mobility or conferencing) to help attract these important allies, who may also be a source of budget if you can't get company-wide buy-in to begin with.

The IT Director, with his or her unique mix of strategic and tactical oversight and insight across multiple domains, is often the source of a UC initiative. The IT Director, whose basic responsibility is managing IT managers, is generally the champion of UC technologies at a senior management level, with a strategic view of the scope and budget of the project, and the responsibility to track and communicate the business benefits of UC. He or she will likely be responsible for the overall evaluation of the UC solution, finding the budget and talent needed to deploy UC solutions, and deciding the degree of outsourcing that is appropriate.

Integrator Roles

Under the IT Director, there are at 5 "integrator" roles that are crucial to successful Unified Communications evaluation and preparation for deployment. These are people whose ability to reach across domains is critical: the IT manager, Architect, Project Manager, Service/Support Manager, and Training Consultant, all of whom will interact

with the various engineering personnel charged with actual deployment. The figure depicts their relationship and some responsibilities.



IT Manager: managing the implementation team. The IT Manager is likely to be responsible for the overall strategy for deployment, and assists in gaining support for it from senior management and business groups, often struggling to set appropriate expectations among stakeholders. He or she will concentrate on promoting collaboration among the disparate groups involved in UC deployment, and may manage outsourced resources as well. The IT Manager is often pressed for time and is likely to lack the personnel resources needed, forcing him or her to rely heavily on the deployment team to do the best they can.

Senior Architect: managing end-to-end UC deployment. The Senior Architect is charged with the creation of an end-to-end solution design for UC and making sure that all the technical pieces come together. He or she plays a key role in evaluation, and is the point person for integrating the efforts across functional teams (e.g., server/messaging, desktop, network, telephony/VoIP, and security). The Senior Architect must attempt to satisfy the concerns of the various teams regarding the impact of Unified Communications; for instance, bandwidth for the network teams, policies and desktop control for the security group, and so forth.

As noted in the Figure, the IT Manager and the Senior Architect will often form a “dynamic duo” that becomes the main engine of UC deployment.

Project Manager: managing the schedule of deployment. The Project Manager is responsible for aligning the project to business goals, coordinating tasks, and keeping things running smoothly and on time. He or she must facilitate cross-team communication and manage conflict escalations, as well as monitoring usage of the new capabilities to judge adoption, alignment, and acceptance. The Project Manager often works with staff that are themselves just figuring out the technology, and, like other key roles, is likely to struggle with understaffing.

Service/Support Manager: managing the help desk and level 2 support. The Service Manager can be a critical part of Unified Communications deployment, and will be largely responsible for ensuring that end users are not overwhelmed by the new capabilities offered. The cross-functional aspects of UC (e.g., server vs. telephony) can make his or her job particularly difficult, both at the help desk level, which will generally be confused about where to re-direct user inquiries, and among Tier-2 staff, whose knowledge base will need to be broadened. The Service Manager, like the Project Manager, will be working with people learning on the fly, and will spend a lot of time discerning the appropriate ownership of issues, as well as struggling with “siloed” tools that make it difficult to track UC issues end-to-end.

Training Consultant: bringing IT staff and end users on board. The Training Consultant may be on-staff or outsourced, and will play a role similar to that of the Service Manager, with whom he or she will need to closely cooperate. User inertia and resistance can be a huge problem if not addressed by proactive training programs and outreach. Many users have little experience even with Instant Messaging, and those that do are

likely to be reluctant to switch clients. Because telephones are a fundamental and almost transparent business tools, users are likely to be leery of changing the way they use them. The Training Consultant will have to work closely with both the Service Manager and the Project Manager to track uptake, issues, and satisfaction among users and adapt the training programs accordingly.

Deployment Roles

Engineers (Network, Servers, Security, and Telephony): these roles are very important, as it is here that the actual work of deployment gets done.

- Systems Engineers: install, configure, and maintain OCS 2007 or Exchange 2007 servers. These personnel are central to Microsoft UC deployments, as most of the skills needed already exist here or can be rapidly mastered. As noted below, with training, one of these engineers can serve at the Unified Communications Administrator. In addition, knowledge of telephony vocabulary can help this team guide the telephony team or related vendors during deployment.
- VoIP/Telephony Engineer: manage PSTN, PBX, IPPBX, and carrier. As noted above, if there is already some network-centric VoIP in place, this engineer may resist joining the server team, preferring to remain with the network team or as part of an independent VoIP team. Cooperation from this engineer and team is important to help the server team build voice components.
- Network Engineer: evaluate network bandwidth and QoS issues.
- Security Engineer: evaluate firewall and other security policies. In highly regulated industries, may be involved in change or addition orders for equipment or applications impacted by compliance concerns.
- Desktop Administrator: manage remote client deployments.

It is with the engineering staff that managers must take the greatest care to encourage teamwork during evaluation and deployment, as formerly siloed teams find themselves tasked with close collaboration with each other. These staff members not only do the heavy lifting in deployment, but are also responsible for reviewing requirements and making sure that their area of responsibility is not negatively impacted by UC deployment. Thus, for instance, network engineers will be concerned with bandwidth requirements, the security team will look at security and perhaps compliance and regulatory issues, and existing PBX engineers will be concerned about the integration with different PBXs.

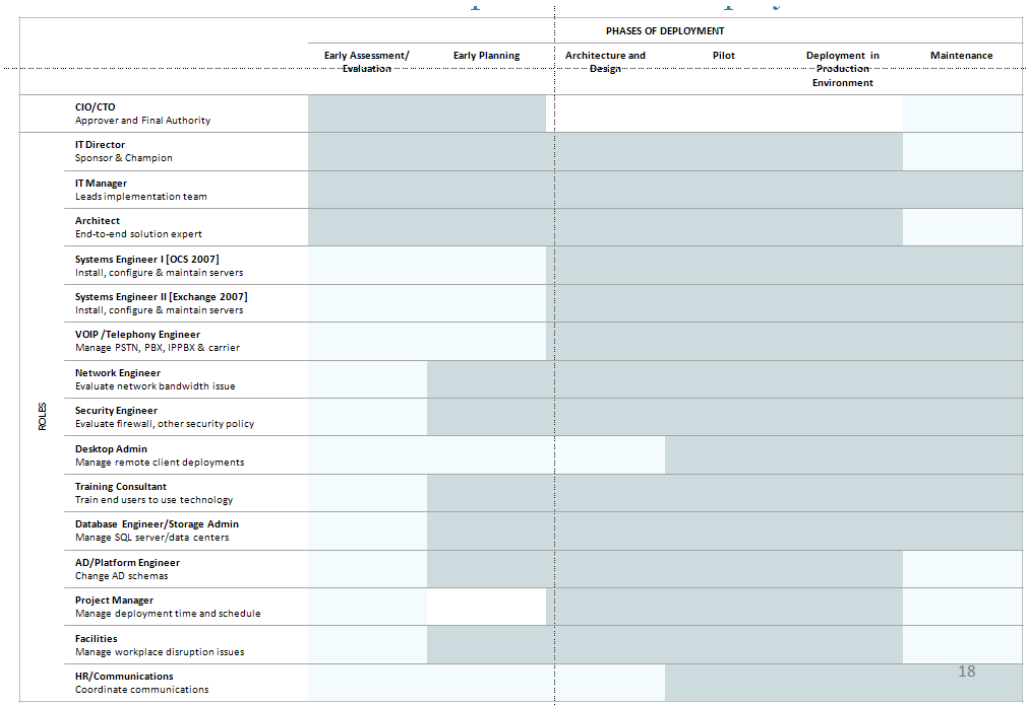
Who Administers Unified Communications?

Since UC is so new, expecting to find someone with hands-on experience of UC is not a realistic expectation. Instead, the ideal candidate for this position, as expressed by many IT managers in the research, combines a particular attitude with some basic experience which is likely to already exist in the organization. As one CIO said of this position, “It’s the mindset, not the skill set.” What is needed here is someone who knows how to learn and who enjoys learning. UC is an evolving space, and both interest and learning skills will be necessary to keep pace.

Beyond that, the general consensus is that a candidate for UC administrator in a Microsoft implementation needs a basic but solid grounding in Windows and Exchange Server technology, which makes for a natural transition into this role for a systems engineer with that experience. In fact, the position tends to be seen as a natural extension of the Exchange Administrator role, which underscores again the importance of the server team to Microsoft UC deployment. As far as telephony goes, the UC administrator need only know enough to be able to communicate well with the PBX/telephony team and find out what they need or hire an outsourced telephony vendor to help with the voice deployments.

Project Involvement of Roles

Not all of these roles are involved all the way through the Unified Communications project. The figure below depicts the general timeframe in which each of these roles plays a part in the UC effort.



Getting Started with Microsoft Unified Communications

SIDEBAR NOTE: Success with the Microsoft approach to Unified Communications requires paying attention to three strategic areas: the basic elements of success, an interactive evaluation process, and a focus on the "must-haves" of UC.

For the purposes of this white paper, we will assume that Microsoft UC is on your short list, and that you are getting started with evaluation and pilot deployment. Due to widespread familiarity with Microsoft technologies, these UC efforts often begin from the bottom up, as described in the evaluation section below. But whatever your situation, you can set your IT organization up for success with the Microsoft approach to Unified Communications by paying attention to three strategic areas: the basic elements of success, an interactive evaluation process, and a focus on the "must-haves" of UC.

The Basic Elements of Success

There are three basic elements in a successful rollout of Microsoft Unified Communications. First, support from the top is critical. As we'll see below, many projects start with the IT director as a technical sponsor. But for deployment to maintain traction past the trial stage, an executive-level sponsor is necessary, as noted above (Key Roles in Evaluation and Deployment). This may not be as hard to find as you might expect: given the business benefits possible with UC, many executives come to look at it as a career-enhancing, resume-building opportunity, just as it is for the technical sponsors.

Second, don't lose sight of the bottom line. From the beginning, evaluate and deploy UC with a single-minded focus on how it supports the business and improves its competitive advantage. The fact that it will also streamline and energize the IT organization is secondary: business users tend to look at IT as a utility, like AC power, and only improvements in their day-to-day use of business applications and communications will impress them. This requires taking the time to understand how users currently do their jobs, which is why an interactive evaluation is important, as it helps you find out how to fit UC to their needs. In addition, bringing end users up to speed with Unified Communications will place more stress on your support organization, so the more thought you put into making UC serve their needs (thus building enthusiasm for the change away from familiar ways of doing things), the better.

Finally, as implied by the successful organizational structures discussed above, you'll find that Microsoft Unified Communications evaluation and deployment is best led by the server/messaging team, who already have many of the skills needed. They will need support from network and telephony teams but empowering the server team as leaders in this process will simplify both evaluation and deployment.

Interactive Evaluation: Start in the Sandbox

Microsoft Unified Communications holds enormous process for improving critical business operations and processes in every industry. From collaborative product development to sales prospecting to customer support, the breakdown of traditional communications silos can deliver a huge boost in productivity and profitability. However, to maximize success, you must work with business sponsors to identify the processes where UC's payoff is likely to be biggest, develop key performance indicators, and baseline current performance before rollout.

To get started on this process, you'll need a pilot deployment, among real users doing real work, to understand what you can offer the business sponsors you'll be working with. The natural users to start with are the deployment team itself. If you make the evaluation process interactive, even playful at the beginning, the right path to UC for your organization will be much easier to discern.

As noted earlier, in many companies the UC effort starts with a technical sponsor; often at the level of the IT director, who tends to have the right mix of strategic and tactical concerns to make Unified Communications attractive, as well as the cross-domain oversight needed. This sponsor, along with perhaps another IT manager or senior messaging architect, will likely have access to a lab at work or at home, and they often use these facilities on their own time to investigate the technology. Once they've gained some familiarity with it, they may then work with lead developers to further play with the technology in a "sandbox" environment, to get to know the interface and technology. Later, these sponsors and very early adopters become mentors to the deployment team when the UC effort becomes official, which usually requires the addition of a C-level sponsor and the development of a business case with the help of business sponsors.

From the sandbox, rollout should proceed in a series of waves, like ripples in a pond: from committed enthusiasts where it has the best chance of success to a wider set of users, and from less critical applications to more critical ones. This approach lets you harness the enthusiasm of early adopters to find potential problems among users who will treat setbacks as a learning experience, and then roll out applications to a wider audience without risking a loss of confidence in the technology among less patient users.

Thus, starting with the deployment team itself, the rollout ripples outward to the project sponsor or sponsors, their assistants, the "invisible network" (the social network of the members of the development team), the support group (this is critical for a smooth

deployment), and finally, the larger organization. Here, the presence of allies among the business units can be critical for smoothing out the inevitable bumps in the road.

Likewise, you can increase satisfaction in the wider user community by starting them with basic workloads, such as instant messaging and conferencing, and only gradually introducing more involved ones such as unified messaging and VoIP. And you'll need the time to bring your support staff up to speed to deal with the increased workload, so starting with simpler, more intuitive applications is the right way to go.

Focus on the "Must-Haves"

Finally, regardless of how you roll out Unified Communications, it's important not to lose sight of the basics. Like any product, UC offers a mix of differentiators that fall into four categories originally proposed by Professor Noriaki Kano in the 1980s: must-haves, performance, delighters, and indifferent.

Unified Communications abounds in performance and delighter functions, but all of these can be negated if the must-haves are missing. Your UC implementation team has to focus on four basic must-haves to assure user satisfaction and prevent push-back:

- Accurate presence and shared identity information: the ability to quickly and reliably find people is fundamental to Unified Communications
- Familiar & easy to use interface: needed to break down communications silos and deliver the productivity benefits of UC
- Security: critical in light of increasing regulatory oversight and compliance requirements
- Voice quality & call reliability: users conditioned by standard telephony expect immediate dial tone, reliable access to the person they're calling, and a clear conversation

Summary

Deploying Microsoft Unified Communications can bring many benefits to an enterprise if the IT organization manages the evaluation and deployment properly. Fundamental to success is the understanding that the structure of the IT organization itself must change to effectively manage the transition as communications silos merge business-wide. Thus, IT's adaptability will play a major role in your successful Microsoft UC deployment.

While everyone in the IT organization has a role to play in evaluating and deploying Unified Communications, the most important are the "integrator" roles: IT manager, Architect, Project Manager, Service/Support Manager, and Training Consultant. These people, whose ability to reach across domains is critical, will be responsible for coordinating the activities of everyone involved. In addition, with proper training, you should be able to promote a systems engineer with experience in OCS 2007 or Exchange 2007 to the position of Unified Communications Administrator.

The disruptive nature of the technology, especially in the eyes of the telephony team, should be viewed as an opportunity for upward mobility enhanced by teamwork. Use the enthusiasm of team members for new skills and new challenges to forge a team committed to success. Beyond just technical knowledge, managers should look for "soft skills" such as good, interpersonal communications, charisma, and the ability to talk about technology in terms that others can understand easily. And don't forget interactive training, for end users and staff alike.

UC deployment is best approached organically and interactively, with an emphasis on real-world experience. Every part of the process should support the goal of gaining traction for the project, which requires an understanding of the business and technical triggers for UC, and how to use them to gain sponsors among technical, business, and C-level executives.

Roll out Unified Communications in a series of waves, moving from committed enthusiasts to a wider set of users, and from less critical applications to more critical ones. This way your early adopters, who treat setbacks as a learning experience, can find potential problems before they can cause a loss of confidence among less patient users. But, regardless of the type of user you're dealing with, concentrate on the "must-haves:" voice quality & call reliability, security, familiar & easy to use interface, and accurate presence & shared identity information.

Additional Resources

Microsoft Unified Communications: http://www.microsoft.com/uc/default.mspx

Microsoft UC Product Trials: http://www.microsoft.com/uc/trials.mspx

Microsoft UC Technical Information: http://www.microsoft.com/uc/tech.mspx