The Art and Science of High Performing Networks *(Part 3 in a Series)*

By Van Macatee

Founder, Xspand

www.xspand.net

Performance Principle 2 –

A culture of meeting commitments

Network quality is defined by a host of technical parameters and other jargon that are cast into service levels and then codified with Service Level Agreements (SLAs). Sometimes those SLAs actually match what real network users require, but all too often, they don’t.

I have never been inside a building without coverage and thought ‘this must be the .01 part of that whole 99.99% availability thing’. But that is another topic…

Regardless of whether those hard negotiated SLAs actually foot back to things the network constituents require not, they are *commitments to perform*. Achieving those performance parameters is (or at least should equal) meeting expectations.

Let’s face it…we are only as good as our last commitment. How do you feel about the car dealership that said they would have your car fixed by 5 PM only to be disappointed when it wasn’t? How do you think the service manager feels about the mechanic that committed to fix the car but didn’t, or how does the mechanic feel about the parts manager that said he would have the part in time but didn’t?

And so it goes... every day we are affected by missed commitments that create dissatisfaction. It doesn’t take but one of these failed moments of truth with a customer to allow mistrust to creep in. Nothing undermines relationships (regardless of whether they are customer-facing or internal) faster than chronically missed commitments. Furthermore, missing commitments has a nasty way of
becoming expensive rework. So, in addition to making everyone mad and being very expensive, missing commitments is no big deal - right? WRONG!

Networks are a complex tapestry of technology and process commitments that combine to define the quality of the service. Installation schedules must be met. Reliability goals must be achieved. Coverage and data speed expectations must become a reality. When things break, repair must be made quickly. The list goes on and on.

Highflying network operators understand this and demonstrate strong desire to meet commitments. They fret over it constantly, measure it and reward it. They preach and teach the importance over and over until it becomes part of the company’s DNA. They master the art of setting commitments such that they can be met without padding or sandbagging.

They understand that the parts manager is part of a supply chain of ‘little c’ relationships that lead ultimately to the ‘big C’ customer and that we only meet the ‘big C’ commitments when we all meet our internal commitments. Whether it is a new installation or IoT robot finding its way across the warehouse floor using wireless enabled real-time-location-services, demonstrating an unwavering commitment to meeting the commitment is the cornerstone of high performance.

Least this all seem rather esoteric, know that having a clear definition of expectations (Network Specs, SLAs) is the first step in crafting the metrics that ultimately become the fabric for governing the network. One of the more advanced components of Operations Science for example is the ability to aggressively measure things that are detracting from high performance – like missing expectations. Measuring things without the requisite culture of meeting expectations is not enough. Measuring things that are not culturally important is to simply admire problems.

And then there is that whole Customer with a big C thing…

Do what you say you will do… period.
Performance Principle 3 – Have a plan...

In the business of networking, you only get what you ask and plan for. Anything else is an accident...

It is amazing how many organizations (and people) go through life without a clear vision for where they want to end up. You would not likely embark on a vacation by climbing in the family car and heading out with hopes, somehow, to have fun. More likely, you would pick a specific destination; build a timetable and a budget to get there. Yet in many operations, we find vague or ambiguous goals for the future. Sure, we hear things like “customer friendly” or ‘world class’ but these clichés never seem to translate into a specific set of definitions or goals that can be cascaded across an operational ecosystem.

High performing operations and networks on the other hand always seem to have a clear definition and set of time-bound goals for their service. It is vital to invest the time to clearly define what level of service your customers must receive to fulfill your value proposition. That definition must then be cascaded such that every person in the operations KNOWS how they affect the outcome. It must be measurable and be measured over time. Most of the time, the target for the metric should become more aggressive over time. If the target is fixed, then you have in effect decided you do not want performance to improve.

My go-to method for expressing the plan for performance is with balanced scorecards and a dashboard. All of the key dimensions of the plan are captured here and then cascaded to the team – each team member taking metrics and targets from the master scorecard. The dashboard is green when the target is achieved and red when it is missed. It is on display for all to see. It gets talked about all the time. Compensation is tied to it.

By the way, if you’re thinking, ‘I have a dashboard so I’m good on this one’, consider this: is your dashboard green? How long has it been green? The best way to teach an organization to be complacent is to accept a green dashboard. In business as in life you get what you expect and ask for. Celebrate turning a metric green and party hard. Come in the next day and thoughtfully raise the bar. That is the true nature of continuous improvement...

Van Macatee has 40 plus years of experience operating large telecomm networks and in now the Founder of Xspand.net.
Xspand specializes in wireless solution for indoor commercial spaces with a focus on the emerging world of The CBRS in a series based Private indoor LTE networks and IoT.

To learn more go to http://xspand.net