

Fostering Trust, the Essential Human Ingredient of Information Sharing

Ask what's needed to encourage information sharing in federal government, and most answers will focus on technology, such as access control and data protection. However, there's another prerequisite for successful interagency collaboration that's personal, not technical. "People who don't ordinarily work together need to develop trust before they're comfortable sharing information," says Gerard McNulty, federal specialist for Cisco. "The need for communities of trust among public- and private-sector organizations is growing, both for daily operations and emergencies that require complex response."

In general, trust develops over time as individuals share information and see that it is being used as agreed. Federal government can foster trust by providing employees with the tools they need to interact more frequently and with greater confidence.

Trust Component #1: Accessibility

Trust grows when employees have confidence that they can readily reach each other when needed, whether with a phone call, a collaborative session combining voice, video, and Web, or an instant message. "The new generation of employees entering the federal workforce are quite comfortable with online interactions," says McNulty.

Unified Communications enhances accessibility in several ways. One is providing "presence" information that indicates whether individuals are currently available and how they prefer to be reached: office phone, mobile phone, voicemail, e-mail, or instant message. Real-time presence information appears in the online directory of a Cisco® Unified IP Phone or Cisco Unified Personal Communicator on a Macintosh or Windows PC. "Presence information encourages collaboration by enabling people to reach each other on the first try," says McNulty. "It avoids those time-consuming IM conversations that go like this: 'Are you there?' 'Can you talk now?' 'What number should I call?' Instead, an employee can connect using the preferred method with a single click." As an example, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration is using Cisco presence technology to facilitate collaboration among its scientists, politicians, and policymakers.

Trust Component #2: Knowing the Face, Not Just the Name

A relationship can only go so far with voice-only communications, according to McNulty. "People trust each other more when they can see each other's facial expressions and body language," he says. "Adding video to a voice conversation lets you confirm that the other person is paying attention and to see nonverbal cues like appearing skeptical or nodding in agreement. People leave the conversation with greater trust that they understand the outcome."

For day-to-day interactions with people in remote locations, agencies can use video telephony, which has become as easy as a simple phone call. Video telephony is particularly useful for establishing trusted relationships with teleworkers. For high-level interactions within a community of trust, Cisco TelePresence approximates the face-to-face experience. Participants can see life-size video images of people in other locations. Accurate flesh tones and ultra-high definition—double that of today's high-definition televisions—reveal subtle facial expressions as if the other person

were seated three feet instead of thousands of miles away. A powerful part of the in-person experience is the appearance of direct eye contact. "People who have participated in Cisco TelePresence sessions say they have the same feeling they do after a face-to-face meeting, even standing up to shake hands," says McNulty.

Trust Component #3: Confidence That the Communication Is Secure

A final component of trust is confidence that the interaction cannot be listened to or recorded, and that it is with the intended person. Since Unified Communications is essentially just another service running on a secure Cisco network, all of the security technologies and policies that companies have deployed for their data networks can protect voice services, as well. Conversations are safe from internal as well as external threats.

McNulty concludes, "Unified Communications solutions are helping federal employees who work in different locations to know and trust each other. Tools like presence, multimedia conferencing, and Cisco TelePresence speed up the process of establishing rapport so that information sharing is more frequent and effective."

To experience telepresence, contact your Cisco account manager for a demonstration at one of 100 locations in the United States.

To read more about the Cisco TelePresence Solution, visit: www.cisco.com/go/telepresence

For more information on other Cisco Unified Communications solutions, visit: www.cisco.com/go/fedunified



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