

DEAKIN UNIVERSITY ACHIEVES NETWORK VISIBILITY AND SERVICE IMPROVEMENT

Deakin University is partway into a major service improvement initiative that is driving network visibility and process maturity across its four campuses.

One component of the phased initiative is monitoring service improvement, and resulted in the deployment of several SolarWinds tools in 2014. The use of those tools is now being expanded.

The Problem

Network program leader Daniel Cleary said the impetus to improve network monitoring came when other IT teams and end users found problems before the network operations team did. "We were frequently discovering incidents from complaints," Cleary said. "Other teams were noticing things going wrong before we did or our customers noticed that we were having incidents before we did. "We were left trying to diagnose those incidents or understand if any changes had affected our services. It was very reactive."

The team had some tools at their disposal, but there were few processes in place on how to make use of them, and any processes that did exist were largely undocumented. "Within the organisation people would turn up and do a 'best effort' fix," Cleary said. "No one actually followed a process. People would just do their own thing."

While Cleary suspected a lack of maturity in the services his team offered, it took a formal analysis using the Fault, Configuration, Accounting, Performance and Security (FCAPS) model to confirm it. "All our services were in an immature state," he said. "Configuration management, as one example, was based on a script running to do a backup but we would only ever have one revision, so we would always overwrite the previous file. If we needed to roll back five or ten changes we couldn't do that. "We were doing configuration management but we weren't doing it well."

FCAPS became the baseline from which all future improvement would be measured. It was also enough to get the business case for change over the line. "The University's eSolutions directors prioritised the work so we could begin our journey to a higher maturity level," Cleary said. Cleary initially prioritised fault, configuration and performance management for improvement. "That's our bread-and-butter," he said.

The Solution

The University selected SolarWinds as its tool of choice and engaged platinum partner Pepperstorm Australia to assist with the implementation, which occurred over a two-week period. "We decided to use SolarWinds based on it being a tool that was vendor agnostic and easy to use," he said. "We have Cisco and Juniper networking equipment and it was important to us that one tool managed as many devices as possible."

Deakin deployed three tools – Network Performance Monitor (NPM) for fault and performance management, Network Configuration Management (NCM) and User Device Tracker (UDT) to



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keep track of devices – such as computers and wireless access points – in its environment. The University's network includes approximately 1800 Cisco switches, 1500 wireless access points and 40,000 ports distributed across four campuses in metropolitan and regional Victoria.

One of the major changes since bedding down the first three SolarWinds tools is that the network operations team now works to defined processes. "We have developed processes to use the tools and have had an overwhelming acceptance of them," Cleary said.

The Business Benefits

Operational staff now proactively remediate incidents before they can occur. "SolarWinds creates a report where it randomly chooses 10 devices," Cleary said. "It will enable us to ensure every device in the network is checked at least 2-3 times a year so we can do proactive monitoring for issues."

Another new process requires compliance checks to ensure network changes meet documented standards. Such changes could be the result of work by contractors or by "people just not following work instructions". "We've been able to discover misconfiguration that have caused end devices to not work properly," Cleary said. "We have a high level of visibility of each device and recent changes made to it. The visibility helps us to understand the root cause of each incident".

Buoyed by its success, the University is expanding the type of devices tracked in SolarWinds. "Instead of just using it to monitor network devices, we will probably be adding UPS, audio-visual devices – because we're a teaching organisation, there's a lot of AV in our lecture theatres – and probably some videoconferencing as well," Cleary said, noting that would occur over the next 12 to 24 months.

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