

Background and Problem

The company supplies equipment to telecommunications operators. If the systems break down, even for a few minutes, then the operator loses revenue and goodwill. Unfortunately, a certain amount of downtime must be expected with systems of this complexity, but each incident resulted in an argument as to "whose fault it was".

Actions Taken

The TVBA Business Advisor spoke to the customer support team at the supplier and to the operations team at the operator. Whilst the facts behind each incident were usually not disputed, the responsibilities of the two parties were often disputed. The operator took the viewpoint that the equipment should work all the time and any failure to do so had to be explained by the supplier. The supplier took the viewpoint that they were only responsible for inherent faults in the equipment and that many of the problems were caused by the operator.

The TVBA Business Advisor gave a short presentation on reliability theory and practice, so that both teams understood the basic principles and spoke the same language and then turned to the TL 9000 standard, which is an extension of the familiar ISO 9000:2000 standard for the telecoms industry.

Rather than adopt the full TL 9000 standard, the two teams agreed to use the relevant parts of the standard to determine their respective responsibilities. The standard defines two sets of system availability figures (the percentage of time that the system is working). These are the "supplier availability" and the "operator availability". The latter is the one of interest to the operator's Financial Director - it's the percentage of time that the company is capable of earning money! The former is one of interest to the supplier - it's the percentage of time that the equipment would be working, if the operator had not caused it to fail! The standard defines which problems contribute to which figures and how to measure the downtime and other important parameters, so that there can be no argument.

The Result

With better clarity as to who was responsible for what, the two teams gradually became less confrontational and more co-operative. When problems arose, the two teams began to work together to solve the problem instead of expending time and energy to try and shift the blame onto the other team.

The result was that problems, when they occurred, were solved more quickly and more effort was available to avoid them in the first place.

**If you want to find out more about any of the areas covered in this case study
and how we can support your business – contact us today.**