

Improving and simplifying PSN service operations: Results of the survey of PSN operations managers

Introduction

We sought the views of operations managers from PSN customers and service providers about some ideas we had that we believed could make service operations on the PSN better support user's needs.

The questions that were included in the survey were derived from our experience of the issues experienced by the PSN community that are the most time-consuming to resolve, and we believe could have been resolved more quickly if better information was available to those involved.

The results of this survey would enable us to understand if the ideas we had made sense to the PSN community or if they could see and difficulties with the approach. The answers and responses would also be used to guide how we improve the service operations part of PSN compliance, and help us to develop some simple new digital tools for sharing information across the PSN community.

What the online survey said

Between June and September 2015 we sent an email to service operations leads we knew across the PSN. The distribution included local authorities, central government departments and service providers. We targeted individuals who had direct experience of managing service operations in a PSN context.

Recipients were invited to feedback their comments via an online survey, which remained active until 12:00am on Friday, 11 September 2015.

Summary of the feedback

A total of 100 responses were received, which was a great response, with some 88% of responses coming from PSN customers.

Overall, the comments and feedback were extremely positive towards the PSN. There was a great deal of enthusiasm for PSN, not only in its current instantiation, but also as something that has the potential to develop to meet particular government needs.

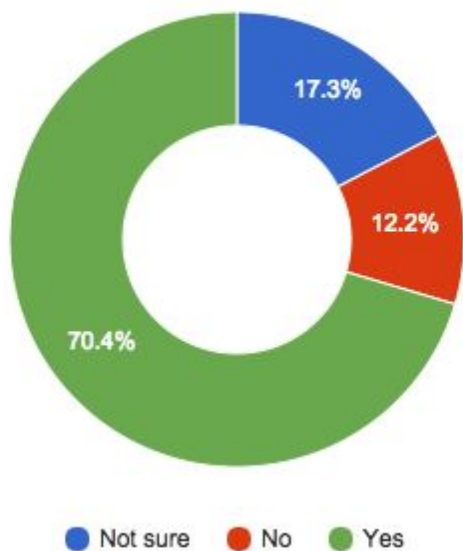
A key element of the survey was to make it clear what features make the PSN distinct. We wanted to do this so that we can simplify and clarify the detailed obligations whilst keeping these principles in mind. We suggested the following distinct features:

- A. PSN service providers work together to resolve service issues. The supply agreement between a PSN customer and each of its service provider enables this, and makes the supply chain transparent and accountable.

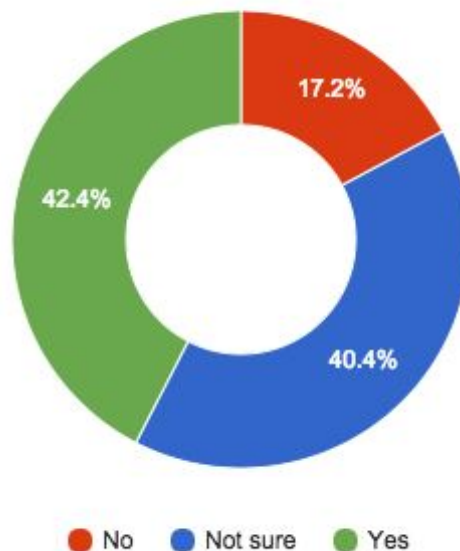
- B. the network delivers a known quality of service, and the GCN network providers are mutually bound, and dependent on each other to continue to deliver this quality.
- C. the network is not routable from the internet. This reduces but does not eliminate the opportunity for cyber threats to reach PSN.
- D. these features are realised, even with a choice of network providers.

We then asked recipients if they believed these accurately captured PSN’s distinct features and if they were being upheld in practice.

Do you agree these are the distinct features of the PSN?



Are these distinct features being upheld in practice?



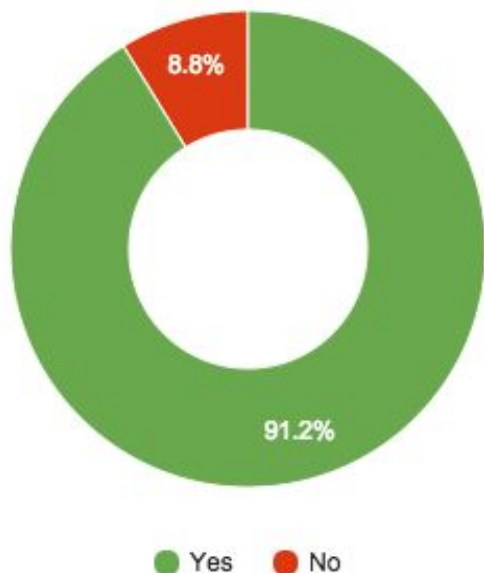
70% of respondents agreed with this, but just 42% thought that these were working in practice.

Some of the points raised were:

- there needs to be better performance monitoring
- service providers need to work together better
- the shared security standards on PSN increases trust between organisations and improves interworking
- PSN needs to be lower cost
- Reaching N3 services needs to be made simpler

We then asked then asked if the current response to system-wide incidents involving PSN connectivity service was adequate and proposed a change so that connectivity providers communicate directly with other connectivity providers, and also communicate directly with PSN-connected organisations. We asked if recipients would join a group enabling them to get direct information on incidents.

Would you join a group that enabled direct communication on incidents?



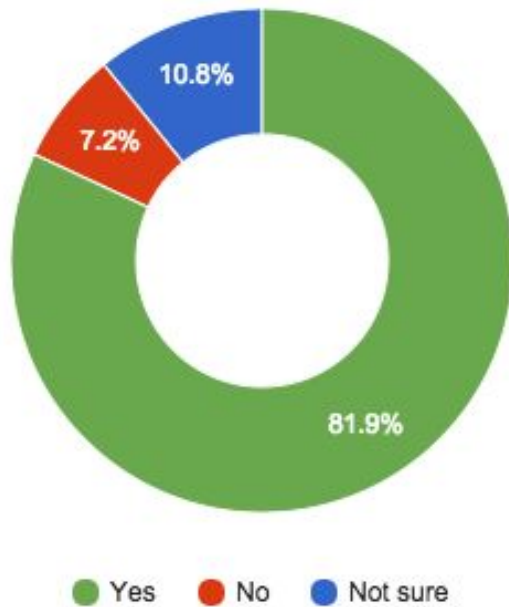
92% of respondents - including 100% of the service providers who responded - would join a group to get direct information on incidents. 61% of respondents said that membership of such a group should be mandatory, and 71% of respondents said that the role of these groups should be broadened to also include problems and changes that affect large numbers of connected organisations.

Interestingly, a smaller majority (53%) of respondents agreed that connectivity providers should communicate directly with one-another and with all PSN-connected organisations to expedite the resolution of system-wide incidents. The main concern was that the PSN team should remain involved as an arbiter, and copied in on every communication, which of course we'll do. There were other concerns about the commercial implications, which we need to think about.

Additionally, 83% of respondents agree with the idea that we should develop a way to record which PSN services a customer is using, and then allow access to this information to help them resolve any issues. However, several respondents shared our concerns about the practicalities and cost of maintaining this information, and only 33% of service providers were willing to participate. We'll take this on board and think about how to meet the user need in a better way.

We also had a great response from organisations who said that they would be prepared to host a network performance reflector device at their premises. There were 26 who agreed and an additional 43 who, quite reasonably, wanted more details before committing. We're now following these leads up and hope soon to extend our network monitoring capability to these locations. This would give us all a really detailed picture of the overall performance of the PSN.

Should we share comments and feedback?



Finally, 82% of respondents (including 60% of service providers) agreed that there should be a way for PSN customers to share comments and feedback on their experiences of the operational services they consume. This would be a carefully controlled environment, moderated by the PSN team that enables constructive and specific comments to be responded to by service providers. Comments will be identifiable and visible only to PSN-connected organisations.

There were strong opinions about this, both positive and negative, and there were legitimate concerns about governance, right to reply, appropriate behaviours, how the tool might affect suppliers' brand image, and how it might be impacted by procurement constraints.

Clearly, there's a desire to develop something here. We'll make sure that whatever we do we'll involve all stakeholders at every point in the process.

Next Steps

The results from the survey were overwhelmingly supportive of the ideas and the proposed approach. As a result, we'll start looking at how we can implement these ideas using some simple digital tools and with some changes to the PSN compliance obligations.

We'll ask some organisations to get involved in alpha releases with us. As we develop and move to beta, we'll monitor what works and what doesn't and keep everyone informed through the PSN website, our blog on GOV.UK and through direct contact with the PSN community.

We are very grateful to all those who responded to the request for feedback. With everyone's continued support we believe we can better realise the potential of the PSN as the environment for delivery of end-to-end digital services for government.