
The Difference between Unix and Windows Admin's

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Fault-tolerance comes in many shapes and sizes, mostly considered in terms of server hardware, IT departments don't seem to spend much time considering what has to be done in the event that a critical member of staff suddenly becomes 'unavailable'.

The most frightening thing is that everyone knows 'any chain of command is only as good as its weakest link' Which is why during the Vietnam conflict, a General Hal Moore of the Air Mobile Division taught his men to learn the job of the man above him, and to teach his job to the man below him.

This makes so much sense and yet we consistently miss this out in our day to day work...

The platform that an organization chooses to run its servers on directly impacts how replaceable the staff that manage those servers are. UNIX/Linux sysadmins are harder to replace than Windows sysadmins because it is a lot more difficult to become a proficient UNIX/Linux sysadmin.

That doesn't mean that one group of sysadmins are smarter than another. What I'm arguing is that if you defined sysadmin proficiency as the ability to regularly and correctly perform a large number of systems administration related tasks, it is simpler to train someone to perform these tasks on the Windows Server platform than it is on the UNIX/Linux platform.

It isn't that you can't perform the same tasks on each platform, it is just that Microsoft has made it simpler to figure out how to perform those tasks through resources like TechNet, resource kits and the IT Pro certification program. All of these things come together to provide Windows sysadmins with a clear set of resources that they can leverage when they need to find out how to perform a task that they are currently unfamiliar with.

Things aren't so simple for UNIX/Linux sysadmins. Although documentation exists, it is often arcane and incomplete. The operating systems provide few helping hands available when it comes to performing complex configuration tasks. The plethora of Linux distributions and UNIX flavors mean that a lot of documentation that you do come across isn't relevant for the specific platform that you have to work with.

A competent and intelligent individual will learn how to complete a complex sysadmin task, but they will expend a lot more time and effort learning how to complete that task than their Windows sysadmin counterpart will.

The difficult road to proficiency means that UNIX/Linux sysadmins are rarer than proficient Windows Server administrators. This makes them a lot harder (or at least a lot more expensive) to replace in the event that they become unavailable.

So, returning to my initial point of the clever old General, upskill your current staff and making use of the vast knowledge base already at your fingertips will save you a king's ransom in contractor fees later, but should you be forced down that

road, be sure to glue one of your lower skilled FTE's to the contractor to make the most of the knowledge that is there!