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Intent-Based Networking - Concepts and Definitions  
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Abstract

Intent and Intent-Based Networking (IBN) are taking the industry by storm. At the same time, those terms are used loosely and often inconsistently, in many cases overlapping and confused with other concepts such as "Policy". This document clarifies the concept of "Intent" and provides an overview of functionality that is associated with it. The goal is to contribute towards a common and shared understanding of terms, concepts, and functionality that can be used as foundation to guide further definition of associated research and engineering problems and their solutions.

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## 1. Introduction

Traditionally in the IETF, interest regarding management and operations has focused on individual network and device features. Standardization emphasis has generally been put on management instrumentation that needed to be provided to a networking device. A

prime example of this is SNMP-based management and the 200+ MIBs that have been defined by the IETF over the years. More recent examples include YANG data model definitions for aspects such as interface configuration, ACL configuration, or Syslog configuration.

There is a sense and reality that in modern network environments managing networks by configuring myriads of "nerd knobs" on a device-by-device basis is no longer sustainable. Significant challenges arise with keeping device configurations not only consistent across a network, but consistent with the needs of services and service features they are supposed to enable. Adaptability to changes at scale is a fundamental property of a well-designed IBN system, that requires the ability to consume and process analytics that is context/intent aware at near real-time speeds. At the same time, operations need to be streamlined and automated wherever possible to not only lower operational expenses, but also allow for rapid reconfiguration of networks at sub-second time scales and to ensure that networks are delivering their functionality as expected.

Accordingly, the IETF has begun to address end-to-end management aspects that go beyond the realm of individual devices in isolation. Examples include the definition of YANG models for network topology [RFC8345] or the introduction of service models used by service orchestration systems and controllers [RFC8309]. Much interest has been fueled by the discussion about how to manage autonomous networks, as discussed in the ANIMA working group. Autonomous networks are driven by the desire to lower operational expenses and make the management of the network as a whole more straightforward, putting it at odds with the need to manage the network one device and one feature at a time. However, while autonomous networks are intended to exhibit "self-management" properties, they still require input from an operator or outside system to provide operational guidance and information about the goals, purposes, and service instances that the network is to serve.

This vision has since caught on with the industry in a big way, leading to a significant number of solutions that offer "Intent-based management" that promise network providers to manage networks holistically at a higher level of abstraction and as a system that happens to consist of interconnected components, as opposed to a set of independent devices (that happen to be interconnected). Those offerings include IBN systems (offering full a life-cycle of intent), SDN controllers (offering a single point of control and administration for a network), and network management and Operations Support Systems (OSS).

However, it has been recognized for a long time that comprehensive management solutions cannot operate only at the level of individual

devices and low-level configurations. In this sense, the vision of "Intent" is not entirely new. In the past, ITU-T's model of a Telecommunications Management Network, TMN, introduced a set of management layers that defined a management hierarchy, consisting of network element, network, service, and business management. High-level operational objectives would propagate in a top-down fashion from upper to lower layers. The associated abstraction hierarchy was crucial to decompose management complexity into separate areas of concerns. This abstraction hierarchy was accompanied by an information hierarchy that concerned itself at the lowest level with device-specific information, but that would, at higher layers, include, for example, end-to-end service instances. Similarly, the concept of "Policy-based Network Management (PBNM)" has, for a long time, touted the ability to allow users to manage networks by specifying high-level management policies, with policy systems automatically "rendering" those policies, i.e., breaking them down into low-level configurations and control logic.

What has been missing, however, is putting these concepts into a more current context and updating them to account for current technology trends. This document clarifies the concepts behind intent. It differentiates it from related concepts. It also provides an overview of first-order principles of Intent-Based Networking as well as associated functionality. The goal is to contribute to a common and shared understanding that can be used as a foundation to articulate research and engineering problems in the area of Intent-Based Networking. It should be noted that the articulation of those problems is beyond this document's scope.

## 2. Key Words

The key words "MUST", "MUST NOT", "REQUIRED", "SHALL", "SHALL NOT", "SHOULD", "SHOULD NOT", "RECOMMENDED", "NOT RECOMMENDED", "MAY", and "OPTIONAL" in this document are to be interpreted as described in BCP 14 [RFC2119] [RFC8174] when, and only when, they appear in all capitals, as shown here.

## 3. Definitions and Acronyms

ACL: Access Control List

API: Application Programming Interface

Intent: A set of operational goals that a network should meet and outcomes that a network is supposed to deliver, defined in a declarative manner without specifying how to achieve or implement them.

IBA: Intent-Based Analytics - Analytics that are defined and derived from users' intent and used to validate the intended state.

IBN: Intent-Based Network, a network that can be managed using intent.

IBS: Intent-Based System, a system that supports management functions that can be guided using intent.

Policy: A set of rules that governs the choices in behavior of a system.

PDP: Policy Decision Point

PEP: Policy Enforcement Point

Service Model: A model that represents a service that is provided by a network to a user.

SSoT: Single Source of Truth - A functional block in an IBN system that normalizes users' intent and serves as the single source of data for the lower layers.

#### 4. Introduction of Concepts

The following section provides an overview of the concept of Intent and Intent-Based Management. It also provides an overview of the related concepts of service models, and of policies respectively Policy-Based Network Management, and explains how they relate to Intent and Intent-Based Management.

##### 4.1. Intent and Intent-Based Management

The term "Intent" was first introduced in the context of Autonomic Networks, where it is defined as "an abstract, high-level policy used to operate a network" [RFC7575]. According to this definition, an Intent is a specific type of policy, provided by a user to provide guidance to the Autonomic Network that would otherwise operate without human intervention. However, to avoid using "Intent" simply as a synonym for "Policy", a distinction needs to be introduced that differentiates Intent clearly from other types of policies.

For one, while Intent-Based Management aims to lead towards networks that are dramatically simpler to manage and operate requiring only minimal outside intervention, the concept of "Intent" is not limited to autonomic networks, but applies to any network. Networks, even when considered "autonomic", are not clairvoyant and have no way of

automatically knowing particular operational goals nor what instances of networking services to support. In other words, they do not know what the "Intent" of the network provider is that gives the network the purpose of its being. This still needs to be communicated by what informally constitutes "Intent".

More specifically, Intent is a declaration of operational goals that a network should meet and outcomes that the network is supposed to deliver, without specifying how to achieve them. Those goals and outcomes are defined in a manner that is purely declarative - they specify what to accomplish, not how to achieve it. "Intent" thus applies several important concepts simultaneously:

- o It provides data abstraction: Users and operators do not need to be concerned with low-level device configuration and nerd knobs.
- o It provides functional abstraction from particular management and control logic: Users and operators do not need to be concerned even with how to achieve a given Intent. What is specified is a desired outcome, with the Intent-based system automatically figuring out a course of action (e.g., a set of rules (thus, a set of rules is not part of an intent but rather derived from that intent), an algorithm) for how to achieve the outcome.

The following are some examples of intent:

- o "Steer networking traffic originating from endpoints in one geography away from a second geography, unless the destination lies in that second geography."
- o "Avoid routing networking traffic originating from a given set of endpoints (or associated with a given customer) through a particular vendor's equipment, even if this occurs at the expense of reduced service levels."
- o "Maximize network utilization even if it means trading off service levels (such as latency, loss), unless service levels have deteriorated 20% or more from their historic mean."
- o "VPN service must have path protection at all times for all paths."
- o "Generate in-situ OAM data and network telemetry across for later offline analysis whenever significant fluctuations in latency across a path are observed."

In an autonomic network, intent should be rendered by the network itself, i.e., translated into device-specific rules and courses of

action. Ideally, it should not even be orchestrated or broken down by a higher-level, centralized system, but by the network devices themselves using a combination of distributed algorithms and local device abstraction. In this idealized vision, because intent holds for the network as a whole, intent should ideally be automatically disseminated across all devices in the network, which can themselves decide whether they need to act on it.

However, such decentralization will not be practical in all cases. Certain functions will need to be at least conceptually centralized. For example, users may require a single conceptual point of interaction with the network. Likewise, the vast majority of network devices may be intent-agnostic and focus only (for example) on the actual forwarding of packets. This implies that certain intent functionality needs to be provided by functions that are specialized for that purpose (which depending on scenario may be hosted on dedicated systems, or cohosted with other networking functions). For example, functionality to translate intent into courses of actions and algorithms to achieve desired outcomes may need to be provided by such specialized functions. Of course, to avoid single points of failure, the implementation and hosting of those functions may still itself be distributed, even if conceptually centralized.

Accordingly, an intent-based network is a network that can be managed using intent. This means, it is able to recognize and ingest intent of an operator, or user, and configure and adapt itself autonomously according to the user intent, achieving an intended outcome (i.e., a desired state or behavior) without requiring the user to specify the detailed technical steps for how to achieve the outcome. Instead, the intent-based network will be able to figure out on its own how to achieve the outcome.

Other definitions of intent exist, such as [TR523]. Intent there is simply defined as a declarative interface that is typically provided by a controller. It implies the presence of a centralized function that renders the intent into lower-level policies or instructions and orchestrates them across the network. While this is certainly one way of implementation, the definition presented here is narrower in the sense that it emphasizes the importance of managing the network by specifying desired outcomes without the specific steps to be taken in order to achieve the outcome. A controller API that simply provides a network-level of abstraction would not necessarily qualify as intent. Likewise, ingestion and recognition of intent may not necessarily occur via a traditional API, but may involve other types of human-machine interactions.

## 4.2. Related Concepts

### 4.2.1. Service Models

A service model is a model that represents a service that is provided by a network to a user. Per [RFC8309], a service model describes a service and its parameters in a portable/implementation-agnostic way that can be used independently of the equipment and operating environment on which the service is realized. Two subcategories are distinguished: a "Customer Service Model" describes an instance of a service as provided to a customer, possibly associated with a service order. A "Service Delivery Model" describes how a service is instantiated over existing networking infrastructure.

An example of a service could be a Layer 3 VPN service [RFC8299], a Network Slice, or residential Internet access. Service models represent service instances as entities in their own right. Services have their own parameters, actions, and life-cycles. Typically, service instances can be bound to end-users, who might be billed for the service.

Instantiating a service typically involves multiple aspects:

- o A user (or northbound system) needs to define and/or request a service to be instantiated.
- o Resources need to be allocated, such as IP addresses, AS numbers, VLAN or VxLAN pools, interfaces, bandwidth, or memory.
- o How to map services to the resources needs to be defined. Multiple mappings are often possible, which to select may depend on context (such as which type of access is available to connect the end user with the service).
- o Bindings need to be maintained between upper and lower-level objects.
- o Once instantiated, the service needs to be validated and assured to ensure that the network indeed delivers the service as requested.

They involve a system, such as a controller, that provides provisioning logic. This includes breaking down high-level abstractions into lower-level device abstractions, identifying and allocating system resources, and orchestrating individual provisioning steps. Orchestration operations are generally conducted using a "push" model in which the controller/manager initiates the operations as required, then pushes down the specific configurations



to the device. In addition to instantiating and creating new instances of a service, updating, modifying, and decommissioning services need to be also supported. The device itself typically remains agnostic to the service or the fact that its resources or configurations are part of a service/concept at a higher layer.

Instantiated service models map to instantiated lower-layer network and device models. Examples include instances of paths, or instances of specific port configurations. The service model typically also models dependencies and layering of services over lower-layer networking resources that are used to provide services. This facilitates management by allowing to follow dependencies for troubleshooting activities, to perform impact analysis in which events in the network are assessed regarding their impact on services and customers. Services are typically orchestrated and provisioned top-to-bottom, which also facilitates keeping track of the assignment of network resources. Service models might also be associated with other data that does not concern the network but provides business context. This includes things such as customer data (such as billing information), service orders and service catalogs, tariffs, service contracts, and Service Level Agreements (SLAs), including contractual agreements regarding remediation actions.

[I-D.ietf-teas-te-service-mapping-yang] is an example of a data model that provides a mapping for customer service models (e.g., the L3VPN Service Model) to Traffic Engineering (TE) models (e.g., the TE Tunnel or the Abstraction and Control of Traffic Engineered Networks Virtual Network model)

Like intent, service models provide higher layers of abstraction. Service models are often also complemented with mappings that capture dependencies between service and device or network configurations. Unlike intent, service models do not allow to define a desired "outcome" that would be automatically maintained by the intent system. Instead, the management of service models requires the development of sophisticated algorithms and control logic by network providers or system integrators.

#### 4.2.2. Policy and Policy-Based Network Management

Policy-Based Network Management (PBNM) is a management paradigm that separates the rules that govern the behavior of a system from the functionality of the system. It promises to reduce maintenance costs of information and communication systems while improving flexibility and runtime adaptability. It is present today at the heart of a multitude of management architectures and paradigms, including SLA-driven, Business-driven, autonomous, adaptive, and self-\* management [Boutaba07]. The interested reader is asked to refer to the rich set

of existing literature, which includes this and many other references. In the following, we will only provide a much-abridged and distilled overview.

At the heart of policy-based management is the concept of a policy. Multiple definitions of policy exist: "Policies are rules governing the choices in the behavior of a system" [Sloman94]. "Policy is a set of rules that are used to manage and control the changing and/or maintaining of the state of one or more managed objects" [Strassner03]. Common to most definitions is the definition of a policy as a "rule". Typically, the definition of a rule consists of an event (whose occurrence triggers a rule), a set of conditions (which get assessed and which must be true before any actions are actually "fired"), and finally a set of one or more actions that are carried out when the condition holds.

Policy-based management can be considered an imperative management paradigm: Policies precisely specified what needs to be done when and in which circumstance. By using policies, management can, in effect, be defined as a set of simple control loops. This makes policy-based management a suitable technology to implement autonomic behavior that can exhibit self-\* management properties, including self-configuration, self-healing, self-optimization, and self-protection. In effect, policies define management as a set of simple control loops.

Policies typically involve a certain degree of abstraction in order to cope with the heterogeneity of networking devices. Rather than having a device-specific policy that defines events, conditions, and actions in terms of device-specific commands, parameters, and data models, a policy is defined at a higher-level of abstraction involving a canonical model of systems and devices to which the policy is to be applied. A policy agent on a controller or the device subsequently "renders" the policy, i.e., translates the canonical model into a device-specific representation. This concept allows applying the same policy across a wide range of devices without needing to define multiple variants. In other words - policy definition is de-coupled from policy instantiation and policy enforcement. This enables operational scale and allows network operators and authors of policies to think in higher terms of abstraction than device specifics and be able to reuse the same, high-level definition across different networking domains, WAN, DC, or public cloud.

PBNM is typically "push-based": Policies are pushed onto devices where they are rendered and enforced. The push operations are conducted by a manager or controller, which is responsible for deploying policies across the network and monitor their proper

operation. That being said, other policy architectures are possible. For example, policy-based management can also include a pull-component in which the decision regarding which action to take is delegated to a so-called Policy Decision Point (PDP). This PDP can reside outside the managed device itself and has typically global visibility and context with which to make policy decisions. Whenever a network device observes an event that is associated with a policy, but lacks the full definition of the policy or the ability to reach a conclusion regarding the expected action, it reaches out to the PDP for a decision (reached, for example, by deciding on an action based on various conditions). Subsequently, the device carries out the decision as returned by the PDP - the device "enforces" the policy and hence acts as a PEP (Policy Enforcement Point). Either way, PBNM architectures typically involve a central component from which policies are deployed across the network, and/or policy decisions served.

Like Intent, policies provide a higher layer of abstraction. Policy systems are also able to capture dynamic aspects of the system under management through the specification of rules that allow defining various triggers for specific courses of actions. Unlike intent, the definition of those rules (and courses of actions) still needs to be articulated by users. Since the intent is unknown, conflict resolution within or between policies requires interactions with a user or some kind of logic that resides outside of PBM. In that sense, policy constitutes a lower level of abstraction than intent, and it is conceivable for Intent-Based Systems to generate policies that are subsequently deployed by a PBM, allowing PBM to support Intent-Based Networking.

#### 4.2.3. Distinguishing between Intent, Policy, and Service Models

What Intent, Policy, and Service Models all have in common is the fact that they involve a higher-layer of abstraction of a network that does not involve device-specifics, that generally transcends individual devices, and that makes the network easier to manage for applications and human users compared to having to manage the network one device at a time. Beyond that, differences emerge. Service models have less in common with policy and intent than policy and intent do with each other.

Summarized differences:

- o A service model is a data model that is used to describe instances of services that are provided to customers. A service model has dependencies on lower-level models (device and network models) when describing how the service is mapped onto underlying network and IT infrastructure. Instantiating a service model requires

orchestration by a system; the logic for how to orchestrate/manage/provide the service model, and how to map it onto underlying resources, is not included as part of the model itself.

- o Policy is a set of rules, typically modeled around a variation of events/conditions/actions, used to express simple control loops that can be rendered by devices, without requiring intervention by the outside system. Policy lets users define what to do under what circumstances, but it does not specify the desired outcome.
- o Intent is a high-level, declarative goal that operates at the level of a network and services it provides, not individual devices. It is used to define outcomes and high-level operational goals, without specifying how those outcomes should be achieved or how goals should specifically be satisfied, and without the need to enumerate specific events, conditions, and actions. Which algorithm or rules to apply can be automatically "learned/derived from intent" by the intent system. In the context of autonomic networking, intent is ideally rendered by the network itself; also, the dissemination of intent across the network and any required coordination between nodes is resolved by the network without the need for external systems.

One analogy to capture the difference between policy and intent systems is that of Expert Systems and Learning Systems in the field of Artificial Intelligence. Expert Systems operate on knowledge bases with rules that are supplied by users, analogous to policy systems whose policies are supplied by users. They are able to make automatic inferences based on those rules, but are not able to "learn" new rules on their own. Learning Systems (popularized by deep learning and neural networks), on the other hand, are able to learn without depending on user programming or articulation of rules. However, they do require a learning or training phase, and explanations of actions that the system actually takes provide a different set of challenges. Analogous to intent-based systems, users focus on what they would like the learning system to accomplish, but not how to do it.

## 5. Principles

The following main operating principles allow characterizing the intent-based/-driven/-defined nature of a system.

1. Single Source of Truth (SSoT) and Single Version/View of Truth (SVoT). The SSoT is an essential component of an intent-based system as it enables several important operations. The set of validated intent expressions is the system's SSoT. SSoT and the

records of the operational states enable comparing the intended state and actual state of the system and determining drift between them. SSoT and the drift information provide the basis for corrective actions. If the intent-based is equipped with prediction capabilities or means, it can further develop strategies to anticipate, plan, and pro-actively act on the diverging trends with the aim to minimize their impact. Beyond providing a means for consistent system operation, SSoT also allows for better traceability to validate if/how the initial intent and associated business goals have been properly met, to evaluate the impacts of changes in the intent parameters and impacts and effects of the events occurring in the system. Single Version (or View) of Truth derives from the SSoT and can be used to perform other operations such as query, poll, or filter the measured and correlated information to create so-called "views". These views can serve the operators and/or the users of the intent-based system. To create intents as single sources of truth, the intent-based system must follow well-specified and well-documented processes and models. In other contexts [Lenrow15], SSoT is also referred to as the invariance of the intent.

2. One-touch but not one-shot. In an ideal intent-based system, the user expresses its intents in one form or another, and then the system takes over all subsequent operations (one-touch). A zero-touch approach could also be imagined in the case where the intent-based system has the capabilities or means to recognize intentions in any form of data. However, the zero- or one-touch approach should not be mistaken the fact that reaching the state of a well-formed and valid intent expression is not a one-shot process. On the contrary, the interfacing between the user and the intent-based system could be designed as an interactive and iterative process. Depending on the level of abstraction, the intent expressions will initially contain more or less implicit parts, and unprecise or unknown parameters and constraints. The role of the intent-based system is to parse, understand, and refine the intent expression to reach a well-formed and valid intent expression that can be further used by the system for the fulfillment and assurance operations. An intent refinement process could use a combination of iterative steps involving the user to validate the proposed refined intent and to ask the user for clarifications in case some parameters or variables could not be deduced or learned by the means of the system itself. In addition, the Intent-Based System will need to moderate between conflicting intent, helping users to properly choose between intent alternatives that may have different ramifications.

3. **Autonomy and Supervision.** A desirable goal for an intent-based system is to offer a high degree of flexibility and freedom on both the user side and system side, e.g., by giving the user the ability to express intents using its own terms, by supporting different forms of expression of intents and being capable of refining the intent expressions to well-formed and exploitable expressions. The dual principle of autonomy and supervision allows to operate a system that will have the necessary levels of autonomy to conduct its tasks and operations without requiring intervention of the user and taking its own decisions (within its areas of concern and span of control) as how to perform and meet the user expectations in terms of performance and quality, while at the same time providing the proper level of supervision to satisfy the user requirements for reporting and escalation of relevant information.
4. **Learning.** An intent-based system is a learning system. By contrast to the imperative type of system, such as Event-Condition-Action policy rules, where the user defines beforehand the expected behavior of the system to various events and conditions, in an intent-based system, the user only declares what the system should achieve and not how to achieve these goals. There is thus a transfer of reasoning/rationality from the human (domain knowledge) to the system. This transfer of cognitive capability also implies the availability in the intent-based system of capabilities or means for learning, reasoning, and knowledge representation and management. The learning abilities of an intent-based systems can apply to different tasks such as optimization of the intent rendering or intent refinement processes. The fact that an intent-based system is a continuously evolving system creates the condition for continuous learning and optimization. Other cognitive capabilities such as planning can also be leveraged in an intent-based system to anticipate or forecast future system state and response to changes in intents or network conditions and thus elaboration of plans to accommodate the changes while preserving system stability and efficiency in a trade-off with cost and robustness of operations. Cope with unawareness of users (smart recommendations).
5. **Capability exposure.** Capability exposure consists in the need for expressive network capabilities, requirements, and constraints to be able to compose/decompose intents and map the user's expectations to the system capabilities.
6. **Abstract and outcome-driven.** Users do not need to be concerned with how intent is achieved and are empowered to think in terms of outcomes. In addition, they do can refer to concepts at a

higher level of abstractions, independent e.g. of vendor-specific renderings.

The described principles are perhaps the most prominent, but they are not an exhaustive list. There are additional aspects to consider, such as:

- o Intent targets are not individual devices but typically aggregations (such as groups of devices adhering to a common criteria, such as devices of a particular role) or abstractions (such as service types, service instances, topologies)
- o Abstraction and inherent virtualization: agnostic to implementation details
- o Human-tailored network interaction: IBN SHOULD speak the language of the user as opposed to requiring the user to speak the language of the device/network
- o Explainability as an important IBN function, detection and IBN-aided resolution of conflicting intent, reconciliation of what the user wants and what the network can actually do
- o Inherent support, verification, and assurance of trust

All of these principles and considerations have implications on the design of intent-based systems and their supporting architecture and need to be considered when deriving functional and operational requirements.

## 6. Intent-Based Networking - Functionality

Intent-Based Networking involves a wide variety of functions which can be roughly divided into two categories:

- o Intent Fulfillment provides functions and interfaces that allow users to communicate intent to the network, and that perform the necessary actions to ensure that intent is achieved. This includes algorithms to determine proper courses of action and functions that learn to optimize outcomes over time. In addition, it also includes more traditional functions such as any required orchestration of coordinated configuration operations across the network and rendering of higher-level abstractions into lower-level parameters and control knobs.
- o Intent Assurance provides functions and interfaces that allow users to validate and monitor that the network is indeed adhering to and complying with intent. This is necessary to assess the

effectiveness of actions taken as part of fulfillment, providing important feedback that allows those functions to be trained or tuned over time to optimize outcomes. In addition, Intent Assurance is necessary to address "intent drift". Intent drift occurs when a system originally meets the intent, but over time gradually allows its behavior to change or be affected until it no longer does, or does so in a less effective manner.

The following sections provide a more comprehensive overview of those functions.

## 6.1. Intent Fulfillment

Intent fulfillment is concerned with the functions that take intent from its origination by a user (generally, an administrator of the responsible organization) to its realization in the network.

### 6.1.1. Intent Ingestion and Interaction with Users

The first set of functions is concerned with "ingesting" intent, i.e. obtaining intent through interactions with users. They provide functions that recognize intent from interaction with the user as well as functions that allow users to refine their intent and articulate it in such ways so that it becomes actionable by an Intent-Based System. Typically, those functions go beyond a traditional API, although they may include APIs provided for interactions with other machines. They may support unconventional human-machine interactions, in which a human will not simply give simple commands, but which may involve a human-machine dialog to provide clarifications, to explain ramifications and trade-offs, and to facilitate refinements. The goal is ultimately to make intent-based systems as easy and natural to use as possible, allowing the user to interact with the Intent-Based System in ways that does not involve a steep learning curve forcing the user to learn the "language" of the system

### 6.1.2. Intent Translation

A second set of functions needs to translate user intent into courses of actions and requests to take against the network, which will be meaningful to network configuration and provisioning systems. These functions lie at the core of Intent-Based Systems, bridging the gap between interaction with users on one hand and the traditional management and operations side that will need to orchestrate provisioning and configuration across the network.

Beyond merely breaking down a higher layer of abstraction (intent) into a lower layer of abstraction (policies, device configuration),



Intent Translation functions can be complemented with functions and algorithms that perform optimizations and that are able to learn and improve over time in order to result in the best outcomes, specifically in cases where multiple ways of achieving those outcomes are conceivable. For example, satisfying an intent may involve computation of paths and other parameters that need will need to be configured across the network. Heuristics and algorithms to do so may evolve over time to optimize outcomes which may depend a myriad of dynamic network conditions and context.

#### 6.1.3. Intent Orchestration

A third set of functions deals with the actual configuration and provisioning steps that need to be orchestrated across the network and that were determined by the previous intent translation step.

#### 6.2. Intent Assurance

Assurance is concerned with the functions that are necessary to ensure that the network indeed complies with the desired intent once it has been fulfilled.

##### 6.2.1. Monitoring

A first set of assurance functions monitors and observes the network and its exhibited behavior. This includes all the usual assurance functions such as monitoring the network for events and performance outliers, performing measurements to assess service levels that are being delivered, generating and collecting telemetry data. Monitoring and observation are required as basis for the next set of functions that assess whether the observed behavior is in fact in compliance with the behavior that is expected based on the intent.

##### 6.2.2. Intent Compliance Assessment

At the core of Intent Assurance are functions that compare the actual network behavior that is being monitored and observed with the intended behavior that is expected per the intent. These functions continuously assess and validate whether the observation indicates compliance with intent. This includes assessing the effectiveness of intent fulfillment actions, including verifying that the actions had the desired effect and assessing the magnitude of the effect as applicable. It can also include functions that perform analysis and aggregation of raw observation data. The results of the assessment can be fed back to facilitate learning functions that optimize outcomes.

Intent compliance assessment also includes assessing whether intent drift occurs over time. Intent drift can be caused by control plane or lower-level management operations that inadvertently cause behavior changes which conflict with intent which was orchestrated earlier. Intent-Based Systems and Networks need to be able to detect when such drift occurs or is about to occur.

### 6.2.3. Intent Compliance Actions

When intent drift occurs or network behavior is inconsistent with desired intent, functions that are able to trigger corrective actions are needed. This includes actions needed to resolve intent drift and bring the network back into compliance. Alternatively and where necessary, reporting functions need to be triggered that alert operators and provide them with the necessary information and tools to react appropriately, e.g. by helping them articulate modifications to the original intent to moderate between conflicting concerns.

### 6.2.4. Abstraction, Aggregation, Reporting

The outcome of Intent Assurance needs to be reported back to the user in ways that allows the user to relate the outcomes to their intent. This requires a set of functions that are able to analyze, aggregate, and abstract the results of the observations accordingly. In many cases, lower-level concepts such as detailed performance statistics and observations related to low-level settings need to be "up-leveled" to concepts the user can relate to and take action on.

The required aggregation and analysis functionality needs to be complemented with functions that report intent compliance status and provide adequate summarization and visualization to the user.

## 7. Life-cycle

Intent is subject to a life-cycle: it comes into being, may undergo changes over the course of time, and may at some point be retracted. This life-cycle is closely tied to various interconnection functions that are associated with the intent concept.

Figure 1 depicts an intent life-cycle and its main functions. The functions were introduced in Section 6 and are divided into two functional (horizontal) planes, reflecting the distinction between fulfillment and assurance. In addition, they are divided into three (vertical) spaces.

The spaces indicate the different perspectives and interactions with different roles that are involved in addressing the functions:

- o The user space involves the functions that interface the network and intent-based system with the human user. It involves the functions that allow users to articulate and the intent-based system to recognize that intent. It also involves the functions that report back the status of the network relative to the intent and that allow users to assess whether their intent has the desired effect.
- o The translation or Intent-Based System (IBS) space involves the functions that bridge the gap between intent users and network operations. This includes the functions used to translate an intent into a course of action, the algorithms used to plan and optimize those courses of actions also in consideration of feedback, the functions to analyze and abstract observations to validate compliance with the intent and take corrective actions as necessary.
- o The Network Operations space, finally, involves the traditional orchestration, configuration, monitoring, and measurement functions, which are used to effectuate the rendered intent and observe its effects on the network.

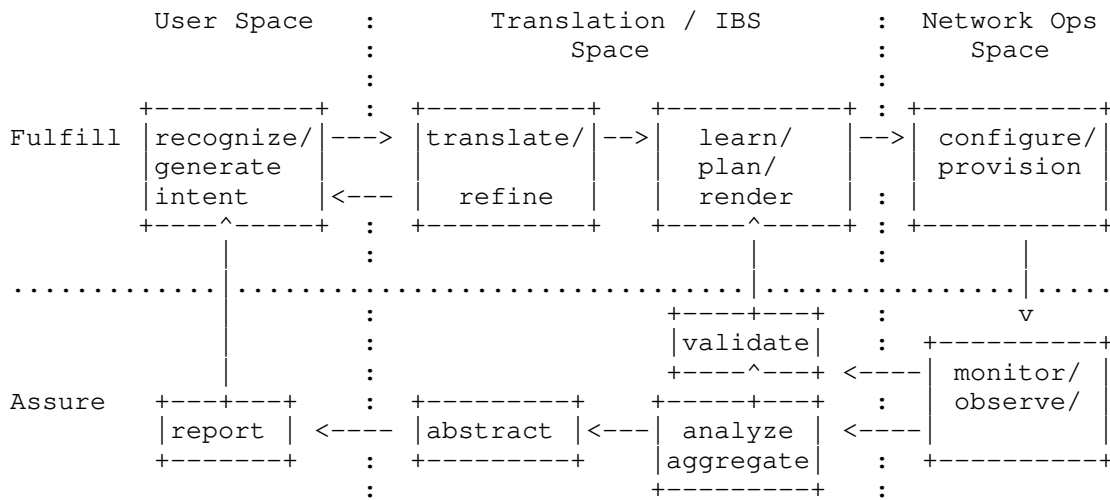


Figure 1: Intent Life-cycle

When carefully inspecting the diagram, it becomes apparent that the intent life-cycle, in fact, involves two cycles, or loops:

- o The "inner" intent control loop between IBS and Network Operations space is completely autonomic and does not involve any human in the loop. It involves automatic analysis and validation of intent based on observations from the network operations space. Those observations are fed into the function that plans the rendering of networking intent in order to make adjustments as needed in the configuration of the network.
- o The "outer" intent control loop involves the user space and includes the user taking action and adjusting their intent based on feedback from the IBS.

## 8. Additional Considerations

Given the popularity of the term "intent", its use could be broadened to encompass also known or related concepts, resulting in "intent-washing" that paints those concepts in a new light by simply applying new intent terminology to them. However, in some cases, this actually makes sense not just a marketing ploy but as a way to better relate previously existing and new concepts.

In that sense and regards to intent, it make sense to distinguish various subcategories of intent as follows:

- o Operational Intent: defines intent related to operational goals of an operator; corresponds to the original "intent" term and the concepts defined in this document.
- o Rule Intent: a synonym for policy rules regarding what to do when certain events occur.
- o Service intent: a synonym for customer service model [RFC8309].
- o Flow Intent: A synonym for a Service Level Objective for a given flow.

A comprehensive set of classifications of different concepts and categories of intent will be described in a separate document.

## 9. IANA Considerations

Not applicable

## 10. Security Considerations

This document describes concepts and definitions of Intent-based Networking. As such, the below security considerations remain high level, i.e. in the form of principles, guidelines or requirements.

More detailed security considerations will be described in the documents that specify the architecture and functionality.

Security in Intent-based Networking can apply to different facets:

- o Securing the intent-based system itself.
- o Mitigating the effects of erroneous, harmful or compromised intents.
- o Expressing security policies or security-related parameters with intents.

Securing the intent-based system aims at making the intent-based system operationally secure by implementing security mechanisms and applying security best practices. In the context of Intent-based Networking, such mechanisms and practices may consist in intent verification and validation; operations on intents by authenticated and authorized users only; protection against or detection of tampered intents. Such mechanisms may also include the introduction of multiple levels of intent. For example, intent related to securing the network should occur at a "deeper" level that overrides other levels of intent if necessary, and that is not subject to modification through regular operations but through ones that are specifically secured. Use of additional mechanisms such as explanation components that describe the security ramifications and trade-off should be considered as well.

Mitigating the effects of erroneous or compromised intents aims at making the intent-based system operationally safe by providing checkpoint and safeguard mechanisms and operating principles. In the context of Intent-based Networking, such mechanisms and principles may consist in the ability to automatically detect unintended, detrimental or abnormal behavior; the ability to automatically (and gracefully) rollback or fallback to a previous "safe" state; the ability to prevent or contain error amplification (due to the combination of higher degree of automation and the intrinsic higher degree of freedom, ambiguity, and implicit conveyed by intents); dynamic levels of supervision and reporting to make the user aware of the right information, at the right time with the right level of context. Erroneous or harmful intents may inadvertently propagate and compromise security. In addition, compromised intents, for example intent forged by an inside attacker, may sabotage or harm the network resources and make them vulnerable to further, larger attacks, e.g. by defeating certain security mechanisms.

Expressing security policies or security-related parameters with intents consists in using the intent formalism (a high-level,

declarative abstraction), or part(s) of an intent statement to define security-related aspects such as data governance, level(s) of confidentiality in data exchange, level(s) of availability of system resources, of protection in forwarding paths, of isolation in processing functions, level(s) of encryption, authorized entities for given operations, etc.

The development and introduction of Intent-Based Networking in operational environments will certainly create new security concerns. Such security concerns have to be anticipated at the design and specification time. However, Intent-Based Networking may also be used as an enabler for better security. For instance, security and privacy rules could be expressed in more human-friendly and generic way and be less technology-specific and less complex, leading to fewer low-level configuration mistakes. The detection of threats or attacks could also be made more simple and comprehensive thanks to conflict detection at higher-level or at coarser granularity

More thorough security analyses should be conducted as our understanding of Intent-Based Networking technology matures.

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#### Abstract

RFC7575 defines Intent as an abstract high-level policy used to operate the network. Intent management system includes an interface for users to input requests and an engine to translate the intents into the network configuration and manage their lifecycle. Up to now, there is no commonly agreed definition, interface or model of intent.

This document discusses what intent means to different stakeholders, describes different ways to classify intent, and an associated taxonomy of this classification. This is a foundation for discussion intent related topics.

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## 1. Introduction

The vision of intent-driven networks has attracted a lot of attention, as it promises to simplify the management of networks by human operators by simply specifying what should happen on the network, without giving any instructions on how to do it. This

promise led many telecom companies to begin adopting this new paradigm, and many SDOs to propose various intent variants.

All SDOs, such as IETF [ANIMA], ONF [ONF], ONOS [ONOS], have proposed intents as a declarative interface for defining a set of network operations to execute.

As such, IETF [ANIMA] defines intent as a declarative policy and focuses on providing a more complete definition of it, a tentative format, and a life-cycle. Within ONF [ONOS] intent is represented as a list of CLI commands that allows users to pass low-level details on the network, such as flows, or host addresses. ONF through its Boulder and Aspen projects focuses on NBI semantics and intent models.

As it can be observed, each of these SDOs came up with their own way of specifying an intent, and with their own understanding of what an Intent is in terms of the level of abstraction, intended users or scenarios.

However, all intent approaches proposed by SDOs share the same following features:

- o It must be declarative in nature, meaning that a user specifies the goal on the network without specifying how to achieve that goal
- o It must be vendor agnostic, in the sense that it abstracts the network capabilities, or the network infrastructure from the user, and it can be ported across different platforms
- o It must provide an easy-to-use interface, which simplifies the users' interaction with the intent system through the usage of familiar terminology or concepts.
- o It should be able to detect and resolve intent conflicts.

Currently, work is underway on unifying a common understanding of intent concepts and terminology. [CLEMM] is currently leading these efforts by defining intent as higher-level declarative policy that operates at the level of network and services it provides, and by capturing the differences between intent, policy and service.

However, even with proposed intent concepts and terminology, and agreement on common intent characteristics, an intent may still be viewed in different ways by different stakeholders for different use cases and solutions.

Thus, the goal of this document is to bring clarity to what an intent represents for different stakeholders, by means of classification on various dimensions, such as solutions, users and intent types. This classification would ensure a common understanding across all participants and it can be used to identify the scope and priorities of individual projects, PoCs, research or open-source projects.

This is achieved by proposing initial classification tables and the methodology used for generating them. This methodology can be used to update the tables by adding or removing different solutions, users or intent types in order to cater for future scenarios, applications or domains.

This draft together with [CLEMM] aims to become the foundation for future intent-related topic discussions where all participants have the same common understanding.

The key words "MUST", "MUST NOT", "REQUIRED", "SHALL", "SHALL NOT", "SHOULD", "SHOULD NOT", "RECOMMENDED", "MAY", and "OPTIONAL" in this document are to be interpreted as described in RFC 2119 [RFC2119].

## 2. Acronyms

CFS: Customer Facing Service

CLI: Command Line Interface

DC: Data Center

ECA: Event-Condition-Action

RFS: Resource Facing Service

SDO: Standards Development Organization

SUPA: Simplified Use of Policy Abstractions

VPN: Virtual Private Network

## 3. Abstract intent requirements

In order to understand the different intent requirements that would drive intent classification, we first need to understand what intent means for different intent users.

### 3.1. What is Intent?

The term Intent has become very widely used in the industry for different purposes, sometimes it is not even in agreement with SDO shared principles mentioned in the Introduction.

Different stakeholders consider an intent to be an ECA policy, a GBP policy, a business policy, a network service, a customer service, a network configuration, application / application group policy, any operator/administrator task, network troubleshooting / diagnostics / test, a new app, a marketing term for existing management/orchestration capabilities, etc. Their intent is sometimes technical, non-technical, abstract or technology specific. For some stakeholders, intent is a subset of these and for other stakeholders intent is all of these. It has in some cases become a term to replace a very generic 'service' or 'policy' terminology.

Concerning this, [CLEMM] draft brings clarification with relation to what an intent is and how it differentiates from policies and services.

While it is easier for those familiar with different standards to understand what service, CFS, RFS, resource, policy continuum, ECA policy, declarative policy, abstract policy or intent policy is, it may be more difficult for the wider audience. Intent is very often just a synonym for policy. Those familiar with policies understand the difference between a business, intent, declarative, imperative and ECA policy. But maybe the wider audience does not understand the difference and sometimes equates the policy to an ECA policy.

Therefore, it is important to start a discussion in the industry about what intent is for different solutions and intent users. It is also imperative to try to propose some intent categories / classifications that could be understood by a wider audience. This would help us define intent interfaces, DSLs and models.

### 3.2. Intent Solutions & Intent Users

Different Solutions and Actors have different requirements, expectations and priorities for intent driven networking. They require different intent types and have different use cases. Some users are more technical and require intents that expose more technical information. Other users do not understand networks and require intents that shield them from different networking concepts and technologies. The following are the solutions and intent users that intent driven networking needs to support:

| Solutions           | Intent Users                                                                         |
|---------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Carrier Networks    | Network Operator<br>Service Designers<br>Service Operators<br>Customers/Subscribers  |
| DC Networks         | Cloud Administrator<br>Underlay Network Administrator<br>App Developers<br>End Users |
| Enterprise Networks | Enterprise Administrator<br>App Developers<br>End Users                              |

- o For carrier networks scenario, for example, if the end users wants to watch high-definition video, then the intent is to convert the video image to 1080p rate for the users.
- o For DC networks scenario, administrators have their own clear network intent such as load balancing. For all traffic flows that need NFV service chaining, restrict the maximum load of any VNF node/container below 50% and the maximum load of any network link below 70%.
- o For Enterprise Networks scenario, enterprise administrators express their intent from an external client (application service provider). For example, when hosting a video conference, multiple remote access is required. The intent expressed to the network operator: For any user of this application, the arrival time of hologram objects of all the remote tele-presenters should be synchronised within 50ms to reach the destination viewer for each conversation session.

### 3.3. Current Problems & Requirements

Network APIs and CLIs are too complex due to the fact that they expose technologies & topologies. App developers and end-users do not want to set IP Addresses, VLANs, subnets, ports, etc. Operators and administrators would also benefit from the simpler interfaces, like:

- o Allow Customer Site A to be connected to Internet via Network B
- o Allow User A to access all internal resources, except the Server B
- o Allow User B to access Internet via Corporate Network A
- o Move all Users from Corporate Network A to the Corporate Network B
- o Request Gold VPN service between my sites A, B and C
- o Provide CE Redundancy for all Customer Sites
- o Add Access Rules to my Service

Networks are complex, with many different protocols and encapsulations. Some basic questions are not easy to answer:

- o Can User A talk to User B?
- o Can Host A talk to Host B?
- o Are there any loops in my network?
- o Are Network A and Network B connected?
- o Can User A listen to communications between Users B & C?

Operators and Administrators manually troubleshoot and fix their networks and services. They instead want:

- o a reliable network that is self-configured and self-assured based on the intent
- o to be notified about the problem before the user is aware
- o automation of network/service recovery based on intent (self-healing, self-optimization)
- o to get suggestions about correction/optimization steps based on experience (historical data & behaviour)

Therefore, Operators and Administrators want to:

- o simplify and automate network operations



- o simplify definitions of network services
- o provide simple customer APIs for Value Added Services (operators)
- o be informed if the network or service is not behaving as requested
- o enable automatic optimization and correction for selected scenarios
- o have systems that learn from historic information and behaviour

End-Users cannot build their own services and policies without becoming technical experts and they must perform manual maintenance actions. Application developers and end-users/subscribers want to be able to:

- o build their own network services with their own policies via simple interfaces, without becoming networking experts
- o have their network services up and running based on intent and automation only, without any manual actions or maintenance

#### 3.4. Intent Types that need to be supported

The following intent types need to be supported, in order to address the requirements from different solutions and intent users:

- o Customer network service intent
  - o for customer self-service
  - o for service operator orders
  - o for intent driven network configuration, verification, correction and optimization
- o Network resource management
  - o For network configuration
  - o For automated lifecycle management of network configurations
  - o For network resources (switches, routers, routing, policies, underlay)
- o Cloud and cloud resource management

- o For DC configuration, VMs, DB Servers, APP Servers
- o For communication between VMs
- o For cloud resource lifecycle management (policy driven self-configuration & auto-scaling & recovery/optimization)
- o Network Policy intent
  - o For security, QoS, application policies, traffic steering, etc
  - o For configuring & monitoring policies, alarms generation for non-compliance, auto-recovery
- o Task based intents
  - o For network migration
  - o For server replacements
  - o For device replacements
  - o For network software upgrades
  - o To automate any tasks that operators/administrator often perform
- o System policies intents
  - o For intent management system policies
  - o For design models and policies for network service design
  - o For design models and policies for network design
  - o For design workflows, models and policies for task based intents
- o Intents that affect other intents
  - o It may be task based intent that modifies many other intents.
  - o The task itself is short-lived, but the modification of other intents has an impact on their lifecycle, so those changes must continue to be continuously monitored and self-corrected/self-optimized.

#### 4. Functional Characteristics and Behavior

Intent can be used to operate immediately on a target (much like issuing a command), or whenever it is appropriate (e.g., in response to an event). In either case, intent has a number of behaviors that serve to further organize its purpose, as described by the following subsections.

##### 4.1. Abstracting Intent Operation

The modelling of Intents can be abstracted using the following three-tuple:

{Context, Capabilities, Constraints}

- o Context grounds the intent, and determines if it is relevant or not for the current situation. Thus, context selects intents based on applicability.
- o Capabilities describe the functionality that the intent can perform. Capabilities take different forms, depending on the expressivity of the intent as well as the programming paradigm(s) used.
- o Constraints define any restrictions on the capabilities to be used for that particular context

Metadata can be attached via strategy templates to each of the elements of the three-tuple, and may be used to describe how the intent should be used and how it operates, as well as prescribe any operational dependencies that must be taken into account.

##### 4.2. Intent User Types

Intent user types, or intent actors as they are known in the area of declarative policy, represent the users that define and issue the intent request. Depending on the Intent Solutions, there are specific intent actors. Examples of intent actors are customers, network operators, service operators, enterprise, cloud, and underlay network administrators, or application developers.

- o Customers and end-users do not necessarily know the functional and operational details of the network that they are using. Furthermore, they lack skills to understand such details; in fact, such knowledge is typically not relevant to their job. In addition, the network may not expose these details to its users. This class of actor focuses on the applications that they run, and uses services offered by the network. Hence, they want to specify policies that provide consistent behaviour according to their business needs. They do not have to worry about how the intents are deployed onto the underlying network, and especially, whether the intents need to be translated to different forms to enable network elements to understand them.
- o Application developers work in a set of abstractions defined by their application and programming environment(s). For example, many application developers think in terms of objects (e.g., a VPN). While this makes sense to the application developer, most network devices do not have a VPN object per se; rather, the VPN is formed through a set of configuration statements for that device in concert with configuration statements for the other devices that together make up the VPN. Hence, the view of application developers matches the services provided by the network, but may not directly correspond to other views of other actors.
- o Management personnel, such as network operators, may have the knowledge of the underlying network. However, they may not understand the details of the applications and services of Customers and End-Users.

#### 4.3. Intent Scope

Intents are used to manage the behaviour of the networks they are applied to and all intents are applied within a specific scope, such as:

- o Connectivity scope, if the intent creates or modifies a connection.
- o Security scope, if the intent specifies the security characteristics of the network or users.
- o Application scope, when the intent specifies the applications to be affected by the intent request
- o QoS Scope, when the intent specifies the QoS characteristics of the network

#### 4.4. Intent Network Scope

Regardless on the intent user type, their intent request is affecting the network, or network components, which are representing the intent targets.

Thus, intent network scope, or policy target as known in the area of declarative policy, can represent VNFs or PNFs, Physical Network Elements, Campus networks, SD-WAN networks, radio access networks, cloud edge, cloud core, branch, etc.

#### 4.5. Intent Abstraction

Intent can be classified by whether it is necessary to feedback technical network information or non-technical information to the intended proponent after the intent is executed. As well, intent abstraction covers the level of technical details in the intent itself.

- o For ordinary users, they do not care how the intent is executed, or the details of the network. As a result, they do not need to know the configuration information of the underlying network. They only focus on whether the intent execution result achieves the goal, and the execution effect such as the quality of completion and the length of execution. In this scenario, we refer to an abstraction without technical feedback.
- o For administrators, such as network administrators, they perform intents, such as allocating network resources, selecting transmission paths, handling network failures, etc. They require multiple feedback indicators for network resource conditions, congestion conditions, fault conditions, etc. after execution. In this case, we refer to an abstraction with technical feedback

#### 4.6. Intent Lifecycle

Intents can be classified into transient and persistent intents:

- o If intent is transient, it has no lifecycle management. As soon as the specified operation is successfully carried out, the intent is finished, and can no longer affect the target object.
- o If the intent is persistent, it has lifecycle management. Once the intent is successfully activated and deployed, the system will keep all relevant intents active until they are deactivated or removed.

#### 4.7. Hierarchy

In different phases of the autonomous driving network [TMF-auto], the intents are different. A typical example of autonomous driving network Level 0 to 5 are listed as below.

- o Level 0 - Traditional manual network: O&M personnel manually control the network and obtain network alarms and logs. - No intent
- o Level 1 - Partially automated network: Automated scripts are used to automate service provisioning, network deployment, and maintenance. Shallow perception of network status and decision making suggestions of machine; - No intent
- o Level 2 - Automated network: Automation of most service provisioning, network deployment, and maintenance comprehensive perception of network status and local machine decision making; - simple intent on service provisioning
- o Level 3 - Self-optimization network: Deep awareness of network status and automatic network control, meeting users' network intentions. - Intent based on network status cognition
- o Level 4 - Partial autonomous network: In a limited environment, people do not need to participate in decision-making and adjust themselves. - Intent based on limited AI
- o Level 5 - Autonomous network: In different network environments and network conditions, the network can automatically adapt to and adjust to meet people's intentions. - Intent based on AI

#### 5. Intent Classification

This chapter proposes an intent classification approach that may help to classify mainstream intent related demos / tools.

The three classifications in this draft have been proposed from scratch, following the methodology presented, through three iterations: one for carrier Intent Solution, one for DC Intent Solution, and one for enterprise Intent Solution. For each Intent solution, we identified the specific Intent Users and Intent Types. Then, we further identified the Intent Scope, Network Scope, Abstractions, and Lifecycle requirements.

These classifications and the generated tables can be easily extended. For example, for the DC Intent Solution, a new category is

identified, i.e. Resource Scope, and the classification table has been extended accordingly.

In the future, as new scenarios, applications, and domain are emerging, new classifications and taxonomies can be identified, following the proposed methodology.

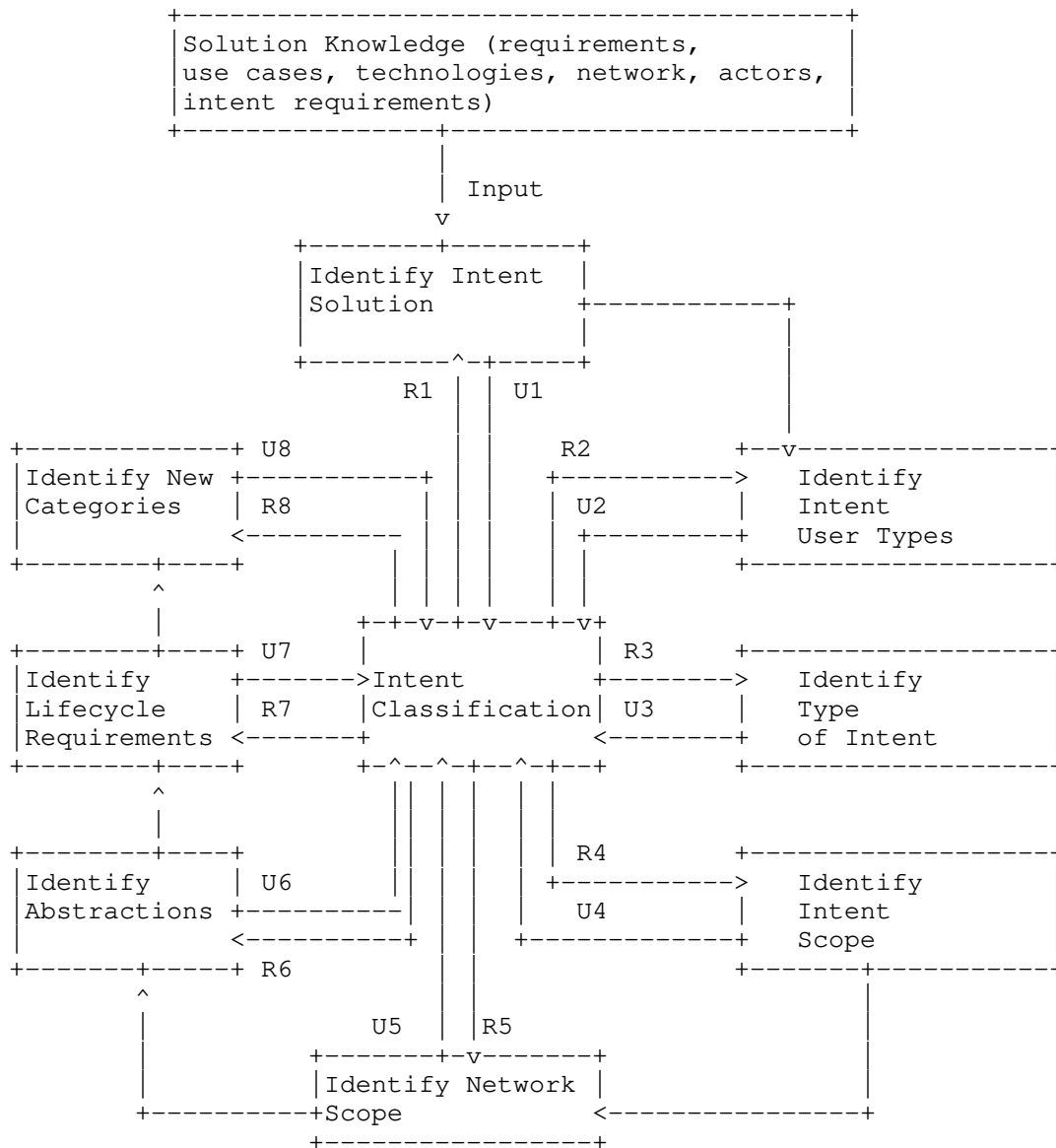
The output of the intent classification is the intent taxonomy introduced in the next sections.

Thus, this section first introduces the proposed intent classification methodology, followed by consolidated intent taxonomy for three intent solutions, and then by concrete examples of intent classifications for three different intent solutions (e.g. Carrier Network, Data Center, and Enterprise) that were derived using the proposed methodology and then can be filled in for PoCs, demos, research projects or future drafts.

#### 5.1. Intent Classification Methodology

This section describes the methodology used to derive the initial classification proposed in the draft. The proposed methodology can be used to create new intent classifications from scratch, by analysing the solution knowledge. As well, the methodology can be used to update existing classification tables by adding or removing different solutions, users or intent types in order to cater for future scenarios, applications or domains.

We first classify intents into intent types and describe each type based on the solution it belongs to and what intent user it is for. We then present different categories that these intent type can belong to, based on intent scope, network scope, intent abstraction and lifecycle.





In the above methodology, the arrows mean the following:

- o Input represents the Solution Knowledge comprising of knowledge about solution requirements, targeted use cases, available technologies and networks, actors, intent requirements.
- o R1-U1: Review existing classification and use/add/remove the intent solution
- o R2-U2: Review existing classification and use/add/remove the intent user type
- o R3-U3: Review existing classification and use/add/remove the intent types
- o R4-U4: Review existing classification and use/add/remove the intent scopes
- o R5-U5: Review existing classification and use/add/remove the network scopes
- o R6-U6: Review existing classification and use/add/remove the abstractions
- o R7-U7: Review existing classification and use/add/remove the lifecycle requirements
- o R8-U8: Review existing classification and use/add the newly identified categories.

## 5.2. Intent Taxonomy

The following taxonomy describes the various intent solutions, intent user types, intent types, intent scopes, network scopes, abstractions and lifecycle and represents the output of the intent classification tables for each of the solutions addressed (i.e. Carrier Solution, Data Center, and Enterprise).

|              |         |         |                                  |               |
|--------------|---------|---------|----------------------------------|---------------|
|              |         |         | Carrier                          | Enterprise    |
|              |         | +-->    | Data Center                      |               |
|              |         |         | Customer                         |               |
| +>+Solutions | +-----+ | +-->    | Network or Service Operator      |               |
|              | +-----+ |         | Application Developer            |               |
|              | +-----+ | +-->    | Enterprise Administrator         |               |
|              | +-----+ |         | Cloud Administrator              |               |
|              | +-----+ |         | Underlay Network Administrator   |               |
| +>+Intent    | +-----+ |         |                                  |               |
|              |         |         | Customer Service Intent          |               |
|              |         |         | Strategy Intent                  |               |
|              | +-----+ |         | Network Service Intent           |               |
| +>+Intent    | +-----+ | +-----> | Underlay Network Service Intent  |               |
| +-----+      |         |         | Network Intent                   |               |
| Intent+      | +-----+ |         | Underlay Network Intent          |               |
| +-----+      |         |         | Operational Task Intent          |               |
|              | +-----+ |         | Cloud Management Intent          |               |
| +>+Intent    | +-----+ |         | Cloud Resource Management Intent |               |
|              |         |         |                                  |               |
|              | +-----+ |         |                                  |               |
|              | +-----+ | +-->    | Connectivity                     | Application   |
|              | +-----+ |         | Security                         | QoS           |
| +>+Network   | +-----+ |         |                                  |               |
|              |         |         | Radio Access                     | Branch        |
|              | +-----+ | +-->    | Transport Access                 | SD-WAN        |
|              | +-----+ |         | Transport Aggr.                  | VNF PNF       |
| +>+Abstrac   | +-----+ |         | Transport Core                   | Physical      |
|              |         |         | Cloud Edge                       | Logical       |
|              | +-----+ |         | Cloud Core                       | Campus        |
| +>+Life      | +-----+ |         |                                  |               |
|              |         | +-->    | Technical                        | Non-Technical |
|              | +-----+ |         |                                  |               |
|              | +-----+ | +-->    | Persistent                       | Transient     |
|              | +-----+ |         |                                  |               |

### 5.3. Intent Classification for Carrier Solution

#### 5.3.1. Intent Users and Intent Types

The following table describes the Intent Users in Carrier Solutions and Intent Types with their descriptions for different intent users.

| Intent User             | Intent Type             | Intent Type Description                                                                                                                                                             |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Customer/<br>Subscriber | Customer Service Intent | Customer Self-Service with SLA and Value Added Service<br>Example: Always maintain high quality of service and high bandwidth for gold level users.                                 |
|                         | Strategy Intent         | Customer designs models and policy intents to be used by Customer Service Intents.<br>Example: Request reliable service during peak traffic periods for apps of type video.         |
| Network Operator        | Network Service Intent  | Service provided by Network Service Operator to the Customer (e.g. the Service Operator)<br>Example: Request network service with delay guarantee for access customer A.            |
| Customer/<br>Subscriber | Customer Service Intent | Customer Self-Service with SLA and Value Added Service<br>Example: Always maintain high quality of service and high bandwidth for gold level users.                                 |
|                         | Strategy Intent         | Customer designs models and policy intents to be used by Customer Service Intents.<br>Example: Request reliable service during peak traffic periods for applications of type video. |

|                  |                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Network Operator | Network Service Intent  | Service provided by the Network Service Operator to the Customer (e.g. the Service Operator)<br>Example: Request network service with delay guarantee for access customer A.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|                  | Network Intent          | Network Operator requests network-wide (service underlay or other network-wide configuration) or network resource configurations (switches, routers, routing, policies). Includes Connectivity, Routing, QoS, Security, Application Policies, Traffic Steering Policies, Configuration policies, Monitoring policies, alarm generation for non-compliance, auto-recovery, etc.<br>Example: Request high priority queueing for traffic of class A. |
|                  | Operational Task Intent | Network Operator requests execution of any automated task other than Network Service Intent and Network Intent (e.g. Network Migration, Server Replacements, Device Replacements, Network Software Upgrades).<br>Example: Request migration of all services in Network N to backup path P.                                                                                                                                                        |
|                  | Strategy Intent         | Network Operator designs models, policy intents and workflows to be used by Network Service Intents, Network Intents and Operational Task Intents. Workflows can automate any tasks that Network Operator often performed in addition to Network Service Intents and Network Intents<br>Example: Ensure the load on any link in the network is not higher than 50%.                                                                               |

|                       |                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Service Operator      | Customer Service Intent | Service Operator's Customer Orders, Customer Service / SLA<br>Example: Provide service S with guaranteed bandwidth for customer A.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|                       | Network Service Intent  | Service Operator's Network Orders / Network SLA<br>Example: Provide network guarantees in terms of security, low latency and high bandwidth                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|                       | Operational Task Intent | Service Operator requests execution of the any automated task other than Customer Service Intent and Network Service Intent<br>Example: Update service operator portal platforms and their software regularly. Move services from Network Operator 1 to Network Operator 2.                                                                                                                                                           |
|                       | Strategy Intent         | Service Operator designs models, policy intents and workflows to be used by Customer Service Intents, Network Service Intents and Operational Task Intents. Workflows can automate any tasks that Service Operator often performed in addition to Network Service Intents and Network Intents .<br>Example: Request network service guarantee to avoid network congestion during special periods such as Black Friday, and Christmas. |
| Application Developer | Customer Service Intent | Customer Service Intent API provided to the Application Developers<br>Example: API to request network to watch HD video 4K/8K.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |

|                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Network Service Intent  | Network Service Intent API provided to the Application Developers<br>Example: API to request network and monitoring an traffic grooming                                                                                                                                                                            |
| Network Intent          | Network Intent API provided to the Application Developers<br>Example: API to request network resources configuration.                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| Operational Task Intent | Operational Task Intent API provided to the Application Developers. This is for the trusted internal Operator / Service Providers / Customer DevOps<br>Example: API to request server migrations.                                                                                                                  |
| Strategy Intent         | Application Developer designs models, policy and workflows to be used by Customer Service Intents, Network Service Intents and Operational Task Intents. This is for the trusted internal Operator/Service Provider/ Customer DevOps<br>Example: API to design network load balancing strategies during peak times |

### 5.3.2. Intent Categories

The following are the proposed categories:

Intent Scope: C1=Connectivity, C2=Security, C3=Application, C4=QoS

Network Function (NF) Scope: C1=VNFs, C2=PNFs

Network Scope: C1=Radio Access, C2=Transport Access, C3=Transport Aggregation, C4=Transport Core, C5=Cloud Edge, C6=Cloud Core)

Abstraction (ABS): C1=Technical (with technical feedback),

C2=Non-technical (without technical feedback) , see Section 4.2

Life-cycle (L-C): C1=Persistent (Full life-cycle), C2=Transient (Short Lived)

The following is the Classification Table Example for Carrier.

| Intent User            | Intent Type             | Intent Scope |    |    |    | NF Scope |    | Network Scope |    |    |    |    |    | ABS |    | L-C |    |
|------------------------|-------------------------|--------------|----|----|----|----------|----|---------------|----|----|----|----|----|-----|----|-----|----|
|                        |                         | C1           | C2 | C3 | C4 | C1       | C2 | C1            | C2 | C3 | C4 | C5 | C6 | C1  | C2 | C1  | C2 |
| Customer / Sub-scriber | Customer Service Intent |              |    |    |    |          |    |               |    |    |    |    |    |     |    |     |    |
|                        | Strategy Intent         |              |    |    |    |          |    |               |    |    |    |    |    |     |    |     |    |
| Network Operator       | Network Service Intent  |              |    |    |    |          |    |               |    |    |    |    |    |     |    |     |    |
|                        | Network Intent          |              |    |    |    |          |    |               |    |    |    |    |    |     |    |     |    |
|                        | Operational Task Intent |              |    |    |    |          |    |               |    |    |    |    |    |     |    |     |    |
|                        | Strategy Intent         |              |    |    |    |          |    |               |    |    |    |    |    |     |    |     |    |
| Service Operator       | Customer Service Intent |              |    |    |    |          |    |               |    |    |    |    |    |     |    |     |    |
|                        | Network Service Intent  |              |    |    |    |          |    |               |    |    |    |    |    |     |    |     |    |
|                        | Op Task Intent          |              |    |    |    |          |    |               |    |    |    |    |    |     |    |     |    |
|                        | Strategy Intent         |              |    |    |    |          |    |               |    |    |    |    |    |     |    |     |    |

|               |                        |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|---------------|------------------------|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| App Developer | Customer Intent        |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|               | Network Service Intent |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|               | Network Intent         |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|               | Op Task Intent         |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|               | Strategy Intent        |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |



## 5.4. Intent Classification for Data Center Solutions

## 5.4.1. Intent Users and Intent Types

The following table describes the Intent Users in DCN Solutions and Intent Types with their descriptions for different intent users.

| Intent User         | Intent Type                      | Intent Type Description                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|---------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Customer / Tenants  | Customer Intent                  | Customer Self-Service via Tenant Portal, Customers may have multiple type of end users.<br>Example: Request GPU computing and storage resources to meet 10k video surveillance services.                                  |
|                     | Strategy Intent                  | This includes models and policy intents designed by Customers/Tenants to be used by Customer and End-User Intents.<br>Example: Request dynamic computing and storage resources of the service in special and daily times. |
| Cloud Administrator | Cloud Management Intent          | Configuration of VMs, DB Servers, App Servers, Connectivity, Communication between VMs.<br>Example: Request connectivity between VMs A,B,and C in Network N1.                                                             |
|                     | Cloud Resource Management Intent | Policy-driven self-configuration and recovery / optimization<br>Example: Request automatic life-cycle management of VM cloud resources.                                                                                   |
|                     | Operational Task Intent          | Cloud Administrator requests execution of any automated task other than Cloud Management                                                                                                                                  |

|                                |                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                |                                 | Intents and Cloud Resource Management Intents.<br>Example: Request upgrade operating system to version X on all VMs in Network N1.                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|                                | Strategy Intent                 | Cloud Administrator designs models, policy intents and workflows to be used by other intents. Automate any tasks that Administrator often performs, in addition to lifecycle of Cloud Management Intents and Cloud Management Resource Intents.<br>Example: In case of emergency, automatically migrate all cloud resources to DC2. |
| Underlay Network Administrator | Underlay Network Service Intent | Service created and provided by the Underlay Network Administrator<br>Example: Request underlay service between DC1 and DC2 with bandwidth B .                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|                                | Underlay Network Intent         | Underlay Network Administrator requests some DCN-wide underlay network configuration or network resource configurations.<br>Example: Establish and allocate DHCP address pool.                                                                                                                                                      |
|                                | Operational Task Intent         | Underlay Network Administrator requests execution of the any automated task other than Underlay Network Service and Resource Intent.<br>Example: Request automatic rapid detection of device failures and pre-alarm correlation.                                                                                                    |
|                                | Strategy Intent                 | Underlay Network Administrator designs models, policy intents &                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |

|                       |                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|-----------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                       |                                  | workflows to be used by other intents. Automate any tasks that Administrator often performs<br>Example: For all traffic flows that need NFV service chaining, restrict the maximum load of any VNF node/container below 50% and the maximum load of any network link below 70%. |
| Application Developer | Cloud Management Intent          | Cloud Management Intent API provided to the Application Developers.<br>Example: API to request configuration of VMs, or DB Servers                                                                                                                                              |
|                       | Cloud Resource Management Intent | Cloud Resource Management Intent API provided to the Application Developers.<br>Example: API to request automatic lifecycle management of cloud resources.                                                                                                                      |
|                       | Underlay Network Service Intent  | Underlay Network Service API provided to the Application Developers.<br>Example: API to request real-time monitoring of device condition.                                                                                                                                       |
|                       | Underlay Network Intent          | Underlay Network Resource API provided to the Application Developers.<br>Example: API to request dynamic management of IPv4 address pool resources.                                                                                                                             |
|                       | Operational Task Intent          | Operational Task Intent API provided to the trusted Application Developer (internal DevOps).                                                                                                                                                                                    |

|  |                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|--|-----------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  |                 | Example: API to request automatic rapid detection of device failures and pre-alarm correlation                                                                                                        |
|  | Strategy Intent | Application Developer designs models, policy intents and building blocks to be used by other intents. This is for the trusted internal DCN DevOps. Example: API to request load balancing thresholds. |

#### 5.4.2. Intent Categories

The following are the proposed categories:

Intent Scope: C1=Connectivity, C2=Security, C3=Application,  
C4=QoS C5=Storage C6=Compute

DCN Resource (DCN Res) Scope: C1=Virtual, C2=Physical

DCN Network (DCN Net) Scope: C1=Logical, C2=Physical

Abstraction (ABS): C1=Technical (with technical feedback),

C2=Non-technical (without technical feedback), see Section 4.2

Life-cycle (L-C): C1=Persistent (Full life-cycle), C2=Transient  
(Short Lived)

The following is the Classification Table Example for DC Solutions.

| Intent User            | Intent Type                      | Intent Scope |    |    |    |    |    | DCN Res |    | DCN Net |    | ABS |    | L-C |    |
|------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------|----|----|----|----|----|---------|----|---------|----|-----|----|-----|----|
|                        |                                  | C1           | C2 | C3 | C4 | C5 | C6 | C1      | C2 | C1      | C2 | C1  | C2 | C1  | C2 |
| Customer /Tenants      | Customer Intent                  |              |    |    |    |    |    |         |    |         |    |     |    |     |    |
|                        | Strategy Intent                  |              |    |    |    |    |    |         |    |         |    |     |    |     |    |
| Cloud Admin            | Cloud Management Intent          |              |    |    |    |    |    |         |    |         |    |     |    |     |    |
|                        | Cloud Resource Management Intent |              |    |    |    |    |    |         |    |         |    |     |    |     |    |
|                        | Operational Task Intent          |              |    |    |    |    |    |         |    |         |    |     |    |     |    |
|                        | Strategy Intent                  |              |    |    |    |    |    |         |    |         |    |     |    |     |    |
| Underlay Network Admin | Underlay Network Service Intent  |              |    |    |    |    |    |         |    |         |    |     |    |     |    |
|                        | Underlay Network Resource Intent |              |    |    |    |    |    |         |    |         |    |     |    |     |    |
|                        | Operational Task Intent          |              |    |    |    |    |    |         |    |         |    |     |    |     |    |
|                        | Strategy Intent                  |              |    |    |    |    |    |         |    |         |    |     |    |     |    |
| App Developer          | Cloud Management Intent          |              |    |    |    |    |    |         |    |         |    |     |    |     |    |



| Intent User                     | Intent Type            | Intent Type Description                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|---------------------------------|------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| End-User                        | End-User Intent        | Enterprise End User Self-Service or Applications, Enterprise may have multiple types of End-Users.<br>Example: Request access to VPN service.<br>Request video conference between user A and B.                                                                                                                                                                |
|                                 | Strategy Intent        | This includes models and policy intents designed by End-Users to be used by End-User Intents and their Applications.<br>Example: Create a video conference type for a weekly meeting.                                                                                                                                                                          |
| Administrator (internal or MSP) | Network Service Intent | Service provided by the Administrator to the End-Users and their Applications.<br>Example: For any user of application X, the arrival time of hologram objects of all the remote tele-presenters should be synchronised within 50ms to reach the destination viewer for each conversation session<br>Create management VPN connectivity for type of service A. |
|                                 | Network Intent         | Administrator requires network wide configuration (e.g. underlay, campus) or resource configuration (switches, routers, policies).<br>Example: Configure switches in campus network 1 to prioritise traffic of type A.<br>Configure Youtube as business non-relevant.                                                                                          |
|                                 | Operational            | Administrator requests execution of                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |



|                       |                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                       | Task Intent             | any automated task other than Network Service Intents and Network Intents.<br>Example: Request network security automated tasks such as Web filtering and DDOS cloud protection.                                                             |
|                       | Strategy Intent         | Administrator designs models, policy intents and workflows to be used by other intents. Automate any tasks that Administrator often performs.<br>Example: In case of emergency, automatically shift all traffic of type A through network N. |
| Application Developer | End-User Intent         | End-User Service / Application Intent API provided to the Application Developers.<br>Example: API for request to open a VPN service.                                                                                                         |
|                       | Network Service Intent  | Network Service API Provided to Application Developers.<br>Example: API for request network bandwidth and latency for hosting video conference.                                                                                              |
|                       | Network Intent          | Network API Provided to Application Developers.<br>Example: API for request of network devices configuration.                                                                                                                                |
|                       | Operational Task Intent | Operational Task Intent API provided to the trusted Application Developer (internal DevOps).<br>Example: API for requesting automatic monitoring and interception for network security                                                       |
|                       | Strategy                | Application Developer designs                                                                                                                                                                                                                |

|  |        |                                                                                                                                                                              |
|--|--------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  | Intent | models, policy intents and building blocks to be used by other intents. This is for the trusted internal DevOps.<br>Example: API for strategy intent in case of emergencies. |
|--|--------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

### 5.5.2. Intent Categories

The following are the proposed categories:

Intent Scope: C1=Connectivity, C2=Security, C3=Application, C4=QoS

Enterprise Network (Net) Scope: C1=Campus, C2=Branch, C3=SD-WAN

Abstraction (ABS): C1=Technical (with technical feedback),

C2=Non-technical (without technical feedback), see Section 4.2

Life-cycle (L-C): C1=Persistent (Full life-cycle), C2=Transient (Short Lived)

The following is the Intent Classification Table Example for Enterprise Solutions.

| Intent User              | Intent Type             | Intent Scope |    |    |    | Net |    |    | ABS |    | L-C |    |
|--------------------------|-------------------------|--------------|----|----|----|-----|----|----|-----|----|-----|----|
|                          |                         | C1           | C2 | C3 | C4 | C1  | C2 | C3 | C1  | C2 | C1  | C2 |
| End-User                 | End-User Intent         |              |    |    |    |     |    |    |     |    |     |    |
|                          | Strategy Intent         |              |    |    |    |     |    |    |     |    |     |    |
| Enterprise Administrator | Network Intent          |              |    |    |    |     |    |    |     |    |     |    |
|                          | Strategy Intent         |              |    |    |    |     |    |    |     |    |     |    |
| Application Developer    | End-User Intent         |              |    |    |    |     |    |    |     |    |     |    |
|                          | Network Service Intent  |              |    |    |    |     |    |    |     |    |     |    |
|                          | Network Intent          |              |    |    |    |     |    |    |     |    |     |    |
|                          | Operational Task Intent |              |    |    |    |     |    |    |     |    |     |    |
|                          | Strategy Intent         |              |    |    |    |     |    |    |     |    |     |    |

## 6. Involvement of intent in the application of AI to Network Management

In the application of AI to NM, an intent is expected to be, on the one hand, a formal definition of a goal or policy instructed to the decision system and, on the other hand, a formal definition of the specific actions that some network controller must perform. Goal intents and policy intents have different meanings. The former will establish an objective for the automated management system to accomplish, such as "avoiding latency to be higher than 10 ms". Meanwhile, policy intents set the overall regulations and possible actions that the AI system can use to achieve those goals. Both goal and policy intents are expected to be provided by humans, although they must be in some very formal language that can be easily understood by computers. All those relations make the degree of formality an important dimension to classify intents so that users, which here are AI-based agents, can be able to choose the proper solution to consume them.

AI technology has played an important role in the different stages of the intent network implementation.

- o Help identify and prevent security threats: Classification algorithms can attempt to identify malware or other undesirable web content or usage;
- o Intentional translation: use AI algorithm to assist the translation module, split translation into the requirements contained in the semantics of the intention; automatic delivery and execution strategy; Automate tasks and appropriate network changes based on the existing network infrastructure configuration according to the policy model;
- o Adaptive adjustment: perceive the quality of the user experience and perform predictive analysis to proactively optimize performance, such as excessive access time;

To enforce the resulting actions determined by AI-based control modules, action intents will have a format that avoids misconceptions as much as possible. This means that they will be closer to machine language structures than natural (human) language structures. This can sacrifice some degree of human understandability, so it forms another dimension in the classification of intents. This dimension allows automated systems to discern which format of intent to use in relation to the possibility and degree of humans to be involved in their exchanges.

Finally, as intents can use different words and languages to refer to the same concepts, all intents related to AI will be required to follow a specific ontology. This way, input intents will be easily semantically translated to formal structures. Output intents will also be composed by following the ontology, so receivers of those intents will be able to easily understand them.

For instance, in the intent classification, the machine learning algorithm can be utilized to extract the intent feature values and classify the intent according to the intent feature distribution. For example, using artificial intelligence clustering algorithm, a large number of intents proposed by different users are used as training data to extract multiple feature dimensions, such as vocabulary information intended to be used, related feature parameters, context proposed by the intent, and the like. Cluster analysis is performed in the same form as the coordinate system, and multiple categories are classified according to the characteristics of the sample point distribution. For the input intent later, the category of the intent is judged based on the similarity with all categories.

- o For specific classification intents, such as safety or fault information, conditions can be preset in advance, and once a common error message occurs, it will automatically alarm.
- o For the network resource information, set the corresponding threshold information. When there is a certain number of link users or the network traffic is too large, the adjustment intention is started.
- o For users with higher priority, the resources can be configured preferentially.

## 7. Security Considerations

This document does not have any Security Considerations.

## 8. IANA Considerations

This document has no actions for IANA.

## 9. Contributors

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