



# The Game Changer

## In conversation with Abhishek Chandra, Leader Customer Delivery, Cisco APJC

Life at Cisco is full of amazing stories stashed away in the humdrum of business as usual. But a closer look reveals employee journey insights, that showcase those very moments that made the difference. A recent interaction with Abhishek Chandra is one such case in point and an inspiration to many early-in careers folks. Ideathon Bulletin (IB) takes this opportunity to share his story.

### IB: Tell us about your early days at Cisco.

**Abhishek:** I joined Cisco straight out of engineering college back in 2010. My first posting at Cisco’s Technical Assistance Center (TAC), was within the Enterprise group focused on the Catalyst series of products. As my first job, I was gung-ho in putting my academic learnings into practice. What intrigued me best was the potency of the product and the scope of its impact. These were things that we may not have envisaged back at college. My interest kept me going for the next 5 years, moving from support to escalations, to a team leader. Additionally, I took the opportunity to enroll in an Executive MBA to further enhance my managerial capability.

In hindsight, that was a good decision. I got many opportunities to lead and hone my skills. I moved into an APJC-wide Incident Manager role, taking on escalations from the region. I kept a regular pulse on opportunities and actively applied for positions that leveraged my skills and expertise. It was in 2016 that I first transitioned to a leadership role with the Data Center TAC, and later in 2020 was promoted as Professional Services Leader. Today, I manage both Data Center and Cloud, with a team of solution architects and senior engineers who help plan, design, implement Data Center and Cloud Solutions for our customers worldwide. This team is a very critical one in today's times if you want your business to survive with resilience.

### IB: If you look back, what are you most proud of, and what has been a defining moment for you?

**Abhishek:** There are quite a few such projects which became noteworthy due to the risks we took. One such was the Armada project, a reduction endeavor. Initially, we were a bit skeptical on how to go about successfully reducing costs. However, there was one idea that came to our minds as potentially promising. Again, we faced challenges because we could not foresee the exact scale or the result we expect to gain. We took big risks and gambled on the potential benefits, and ultimately catalyzed a million-dollar saving, a project we later took global. I traveled to Mexico to train the delivery engineers and VP-level executives based there. <mention the kind of activities (like, there must be some reason why the costs were higher and how many sessions it took and the number of people who participated) just to show the scale of learning and enjoying B2B projects> I still remember the surge of rising mercury levels, the anticipation, and the wave of excitement we went through as we implemented the program. The Armada Project resulted in a million-dollar saving for Cisco. None of it would have been possible without trust, risks, and focus.

*‘... we gambled on the potential benefits, and ultimately catalyzed a million-dollar saving, a project we later took global. I traveled to Mexico to train the delivery engineers based there. And as I speak, I can still feel the surge of rising mercury levels, the anticipation and excitement we went through as we implemented the program, but key terms here are trust, risk, and focus’*

### IB: Why do you think Cisco is a good career platform for the upcoming workforce.

**Abhishek:** Great question! At Cisco, we often use a tagline – One Cisco, Many Careers. This cannot be more closer to the truth because every Cisco employee gets the opportunity to experience a variety of roles. I’ve personally traversed this both with TAC and my current position with Customer Experience (CX). In the last 10 years, there has not been a single moment of monotony. Growth and innovations are a constant component of our solutions. At Cisco, we drill our minds to explore, learn, and innovate ideas and strategies.

Additionally, the breadth of technologies we own, the services we offer, and the functions we lead – they provide a very long-term career growth without doing the same thing for too long a period. This kind of work vibrancy or diversity is one of the key benefits of being part of the Cisco family, the other being that ours, is a people-centric culture. Cisco is undoubtedly top of mind, especially when compared with other global organizations, where youngsters often aspire as the better career option, turn out to be sour experiences. Our customer experience and employee experience both equals none!

### IB: What are your thoughts on work-life balance?

**Abhishek:** Not sure whether the concept of work-life balance exists anymore. Hybrid workplaces are here to stay. The past two years have enabled us to structure our working pattern while living with family. Both are intertwined and it's up to us how we choose to build that harmony. There are industries out there where one may have a 6-hour workday, and potentially go off for the next 18 hours, but obviously in IT and the networking industry, it is different. It depends on the passion somebody has and when we hire, we look at the top of the top performers who are passionate about their work and customer experience. When the passion is there, there is enough to do without being an intrusion into their personal lives. There will be times when, during work hours, you will need to take care of personal things and have quality family time.

Every morning, I reserve my mental spot for sports activities and am out for tennis or badminton. We have a coach in our colony and a lot of tournaments keep going on. Tennis has been a favorite since childhood – I’ve been playing it since I was 7-8yrs old.

### IB: With this we come to the rapid-fire trivia questions. Please share one-word that comes to mind when you hear:

2015	Book	Volcano	80%	Nike
Passion	Ethiopia	Brain	Social Media	The Big Bang Theory

