

## Cisco Collaborative Tools Inspire Ready-to-Adopt Innovations

IT Incubator program uses Cisco Spark™, Cisco WebEx®, and Cisco TelePresence® to develop ideas into innovations

### **HackIT VII, an intellectual playground**

Twenty-four hours of intense mental exercising. Global teams collaborating. Coffee brewing. Sounds like Cisco HackIT VII. Hack-a-thons are an important part of Cisco culture and allow all employees to experiment, work together, and innovate on ideas that can and do shape our future. From tearing apart painful processes to creating innovations, enhancing existing products or disrupting operations in positive ways, hack-a-thons serve the greater good. They are also great for building new personal networks, face-to-face or remotely.

However, ideas and experimentation only go a certain length. Being able to transform those ideas into new functional processes and products takes more than a twenty-four hour period. It takes dedication, constant contact with the involved teams, and the ability to work without boundaries.

After the coffee cooled and the dust settled, five teams (of 105) won the opportunity to take their ideas further into incubation. The winning teams were paired with a professional association in an effort to jump-start the transition from idea to innovation backed by investment.

That is where the International Society of Service Innovation Professionals (ISSIP) association came in to help.

### **What is ISSIP?**

ISSIP is a professional organization that promotes Service Innovation (people-centered digital innovation). Originally co-founded by Cisco, IBM, HP and several universities globally, ISSIP connects practitioners and academia in an effort to bring knowledge and real-world experience together in meaningful ways. The relationship is especially rewarding because digital transformation is moving faster than we can predict. Practitioners learn about what academia studies, and academics gain access to real-time, real-world trends and processes.

“To keep pace with the rapid rate of change, innovation can no longer be limited to specific functions inside an organization,” says Yassi Moghaddam, Executive Director, ISSIP. “To scale, innovation must become pervasive across the enterprise with tools and methodologies accessible to individuals and teams throughout. We are happy to see how by using ISSIP Service Innovation Framework tools and methodologies (developed jointly through a close collaboration with University of Aachen), the outstanding Cisco incubator and HackIT teams exercised their innovation muscles and took their ideas closer to becoming a reality with business impact.”

### **An incubator of innovation**

During a nine-week IT incubator, the five teams paired off with a human-centric framework team from ISSIP. The ultimate goal was two-fold: to help the incubator teams produce polished innovations that were ready to adopt and for the ISSIP team to test their Service Innovation Blocks™ framework in a real-world context. The results were successful for both academics and practitioners.

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“Entrepreneurship or Intrapreneurship is not just about having an idea,” says Jyoti Sarin, Cisco IT Senior Manager, Innovation and Strategy. “It is a mindset built on perseverance, curiosity, collaboration, the ability to deal with failure and to be able to pivot. We are not just building ideas through HackIT or IT Incubator, we are building entrepreneurial muscle in Cisco employees. This spirit fuels our innovation engine – not just in terms of new products but also how we operate as a company. This is where collaboration with ISSIP was key as they complemented our Incubator training program with their Service Innovation Framework. We hosted workshops led by ISSIP professors and industry experts. All of the teams got direct coaching and mentorship on their ideas from a variety of mentors on a more one to one basis. This gave the Incubator teams valuable insights on how to build a LEAN startup.”

### **It all comes together...**

Using Cisco TelePresence®, Cisco WebEx®, and Cisco Spark™, of course. Cisco hosted HackIT VII in 19 different locations globally. Not only were the on-site locations different, many participants were remote, and members of the same teams were often based in various time zones. It would have been impossible to host and collaborate the event without tools such as Spark and WebEx.

“It’s so much more difficult when you’re not able to have the face-to-face contact or stay connected 24/7,” says Heather Yurko, Cisco IT Senior Manager, Services Supply Chain. “That’s where TelePresence and WebEx were invaluable. Spark augmented the face-to-face contact. It was so easy to share files in real-time in a Spark Room. I don’t think we’d have been successful without these kinds of tools.”

“You can see how collaboration across geographies and organizational boundaries can become an important ingredient to the success of an idea,” says Sarin. “Collaboration using technologies like WebEx, TelePresence, and Spark are second nature to Cisco employees. Whether it was HackIT or an IT Incubator, innovators built their teams and solutions without getting bogged down by the need for in-person/physical meetings. In fact, this was an important advantage in attracting more people to come out to HackIT. People with competing priorities, remote workers or the ones who could not stay the whole 24 hours, could just dial back in through a WebEx/TP. For example, this was especially helpful in getting more women to participate who did not want to pull an all nighter in the office.”

The incubator program was successful. One of the winning teams received seed money from Cisco to continue developing their innovation where they will be looking to work with Cisco customers in the medical industry. One other team’s solution was implemented directly into Cisco core products shortly after the final competition. Another team pivoted their idea and decided to open source their solution to strategically add value to the Security Business Unit’s existing product line. Some of the remaining teams are continuing to refine their ideas and pursue opportunities within Cisco. Many teams discovered that their ideas might not turn into viable innovations but they took away invaluable lessons in intrapreneurship that will help in their future ventures.

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