**Cisco’s My Innovation**

1. **Overview/Synopsis (250-word limit)**

Gone are the days when innovation was solely tied to product development and R&D. In today’s fast-paced digital age, innovation has become a non-negotiable competitive differentiator, essential to a business’ very survival. But because innovation is a mindset, it requires *people* (not technology) from diverse backgrounds collaborating on their best and brightest ideas. Therefore, its business impacts are experienced only when true cultural transformation occurs.

As a believer in the notion that innovation can come from anyone, anywhere, anytime, Cisco created My Innovation, an initiative that unifies 30+ innovation programs, fostering a culture of grassroots, cross-functional collaboration. My Innovation lives on the Innovation Hub, an always-on, centralized, virtual community that has become the anchor of Cisco’s innovation initiatives. Throughout the past two years, My Innovation has transformed our culture by inspiring a new generation of intrapreneurs, while creating new value for the enterprise at large.

The most notable My Innovation program is the annual Innovate Everywhere Challenge (IEC), which empowers our 74,000+ employees, across 135+ sites, 90 countries and four continents to bring their ideas to life. Mirroring a startup environment, with employees playing the roles of founders, angel investors, and mentors, this companywide competition connects employees with an ecosystem of innovators inside and outside of Cisco. The first three IECs resulted in 25+ proof of concepts, 20 ventures with follow-up investment, and four ventures adopted by the business. Additionally, solutions developed from the IEC have had a multi-million-dollar revenue impact for Cisco the past two years.

1. **The strategic objectives and scope of the Operational Excellence project**

Always anticipating technology market disruptions, Cisco realized that the speed and complexity of mass digitization required a new approach to innovation. At this time, we began transitioning from a hardware provider into a software solution and services provider for lines of business in different vertical markets. But true business transformation first needed a cultural transformation.

Driven by the belief that innovation can come from anyone, anywhere, anytime, we accelerated a collaborative effort to launch an innovation revolution of sorts across the enterprise. The first step involved holding a series of focus groups across the company and discovered that employees were eager to innovate in their work, but were unclear on the pathways for successfully nurturing new ideas to the implementation phase. They asked for support, time, space and money to foster and develop their best ideas for new ventures. In particular, employees wanted a central forum where they could bring new ideas, build them with colleagues, and present them to executives and decision-makers.

Reviewing employees’ responses, we decided to invest heavily in empowering employees to innovate. As a result, the vast variety of our programs, groups and teams dedicated to innovation were brought together under “My Innovation.” Further, Cisco sought to create an always-on centralized hub, or virtual community, where employees can participate in a wide range of innovation programs, discuss new technologies, and connect with peers with similar interests. Most notably, the Innovation Hub details the annual [Innovate Everywhere Challenge](https://newsroom.cisco.com/feature-content?type=webcontent&articleId=1852795) (IEC), Cisco’s global innovation competition.

1. **The size of the project challenge, use of creative tools, and any organizational development.**

In 2016, we officially introduced My Innovation to the company’s 74,000-person workforce, across more than 135 sites and four continents, and in every corporate function across 16 business units. Ever since, My Innovation has continuously evolved based on employee feedback, ensuring the program delivers the most positive operational and cultural impacts to Cisco, its employees, its partners and its customers.

The key to My Innovation’s success is the Innovation Hub. In fall 2016, the Innovation Hub started as a simple prototype that managed employee involvement in Cisco’s Innovate Everywhere Challenge. From there, the Innovation Hub as evolved to an all-in-one center for everything related to employee innovation at Cisco. The Innovation Hub generates the type of spontaneous peer-to-peer interactions that characterize a culture of innovation.

The Innovation Hub comprises 30,000+ regular users and growing and connects employees to 30+ innovation programs and events– including hack-a-thons, challenges, DevOps events, local innovation conferences and open houses, and training opportunities. Employees go to the Innovation Hub to contribute new ideas, mentor nascent ventures, learn and practice the skills and mindsets related to innovation. The Innovation Hub helps employees efficiently and quickly find the right people to move their innovative ventures forward and to reach decision makers. Within the Innovation Hub, all employees and program leads have access to a host of resources. These include, but are not limited to:

* **Mentor Network**: Cisco asked employees to volunteer to serve as innovation mentors, and more than 4,000 employees answered the call. Through the Innovation Hub, employees can search by expertise, market, location, etc., to find a dream team of mentors for their venture.
* **Angel Workshops:** To incentivize employees to act as Angels, real-world angel investors share with our employees (especially managers and leaders) their insights on how to evaluate startups, perform due-diligence and valuation, and build a balanced investment portfolio.
* **Startup//Cisco:** Using a workshop format, Startup//Cisco equips employees with the skills and mindset of a startup founder. Employees learn and apply innovation methodologies to accelerate new projects so they can achieve stronger business outcomes faster and with fewer resources. Participants use design thinking and lean startup innovation principles and techniques to validate ideas directly with customers. We currently have 500 Cisco employees trained in 13 iterations of Startup//Cisco.

In addition, the Innovation Hub continues to highlight our Innovate Everywhere Challenge. Mirroring a startup environment, with employees playing the roles of founders, angel investors, and mentors, this companywide competition connects employees with an ecosystem of innovators inside and outside of Cisco. The first three IECs resulted in 25+ proof of concepts, 20 ventures with follow-up investment, and four ventures adopted by the business.

The Innovation Hub also showcases our global network of 14 [Co-Innovation Centers](https://www.cisco.com/c/en/us/solutions/innovation-centers.html), which bring together diverse partner ecosystems to create scalable solutions for business problems. They work with local ecosystems (comprising thought leaders, academia, government officials, vendors, startups, incubators and customers) to provide long-term impacts on communities, which are measured in investments, jobs created, neighborhoods revitalized, and investments in startups.

Of note, this past year, we introduced a few new elements to My Innovation, as the initiative is continuously evolving to align with the company strategy and create the most impactful business and cultural transformations:

* **thingQbator**: Under the My Innovation umbrella, Cisco [launched a new “makerspace” for emerging technologies](https://www.bizjournals.com/sanjose/news/2018/05/07/cisco-thingqbator-employee-maker-space-incubator.html) at our San Jose, California, headquarters. Called the “thingQbator SJC,” this physical space allows our employees to take time out of their day to experiment and get “hands-on” with Internet of Things (IoT) technologies, robotics, AI, drones, 3D printers and more. Any employee within Cisco can learn about these technologies by participating in workshops and receive training and mentoring to help turn their ideas into working prototypes that help business, society and the world at large. Notably, we make a conscious effort to reinforce that employees across different departments and roles can become “makers” – inspiring a true culture shift centered around innovation and entrepreneurship. ThingQbator SJC recently completed its first cohort with 57 ideas submitted and 9 working prototypes. The top makers have the opportunity to partner with Cisco’s Innovation Centers to showcase their prototypes and receive feedback from customers.
* **Innovation Ambitions:** With Innovation Ambitions, Cisco leadership was passionately involved in IEC3. Executives, such as Fran Katsoudas, EVP & Chief People Officer; Scott Harrell, SVP & GM Enterprise Networking Business; and Susie Wee, VP & CTO DevNet Innovations, among others, took the time out of their busy schedules to share with employees the business challenges they consider top of mind. These leaders then sponsored ideas aligned with their top-priority “Ambitions,” giving employees the resources, money and support needed to further their ventures.
* **Attitudes of Innovation:** This year, Cisco ramped up communications on the Innovation Hub through thought-leadership articles inside and outside the company, which is making a tangible impact on how employees think about their job roles and careers. Our Attitudes of Innovation have become our legacy of value. They’re who we are—and who we can be. And they’re completely ours, based on employee input we gathered. We encourage employees to explore and learn about their own “go-to attitudes” when innovating. Along the way, they discover more attitudes that help inspire and innovate with that “next-big-thing” idea. We encourage them to rank their attitudes in priority and share which ones resonate the most and why. The Attitudes of Innovation Cisco reinforces are: Be Urgently Curious, Celebrate Effective Failures, Create a Legacy of Value, Don’t Go At It Alone, Empower and Support, Explore Diverse Perspectives, Iterate and Persist, Reward Action, Seek Context, and Stay Ambitious.

1. **The impact of the Operational Excellence project - Detail the customer benefit and/or value generation, and business results.**

My Innovation has created a cultural transformation, increasing employee engagement and providing Cisco’s network with the support and resources to innovate – driving continued operational excellence and business sustainability. Further, My Innovation continues to evolve beyond creating disruptive solutions to best empowering employees to develop entrepreneurial attitudes and skillsets. Results are as follows:

* 73% of Cisco full-time employees from all organizations and from 90 countries are Innovation Hub users.
  + 30+ innovation programs have a presence on the Innovation Hub.
  + 20+ innovation challenges have run on the Innovation Hub.
  + 200 innovation events have been advertised on the Innovation Hub.
  + Beyond these discrete metrics, the true measure of the Innovation Hub’s impact is how effectively it spreads a culture of innovation across the enterprise. This is naturally harder to quantify, but several indicators suggest that the portal is accelerating innovation at Cisco:
    - The number of mentors has increased, with over 4,000 Cisco employees now ready to help other employees innovate (up from 2,706 in 2017).
    - The increase in innovation challenges hosted on the Innovation Hub from 3 to 20 in one year can at least partially be attributed to the ease and convenience of creating and hosting a challenge.
    - Similarly, the number of events posted on the Innovation Hub jumped from 50 to 100 from FY2017 to FY2018.
* 45% of Cisco full-time employees have actively participated in the IEC by submitting a venture, joining a team, investing their tokens, and commenting/rating.
  + Solutions developed from the IEC have had a multi-million-dollar revenue impact for Cisco the past two years
  + 2300+ ideas submitted to the IEC (years 1-3), 4 IEC semifinalist ventures productized
  + 20 of 65 IEC semifinalists garnered follow-up investment after the competition
  + 95% of employees surveyed would recommend IEC to their peers. Over the years, we learned from employee feedback and evolved the IEC process to what it is now.
* The IEC top ventures have already directly yielded tangible innovations, including:
  + One of the most successful and disruptive solutions to come out of the IEC is **Cisco LifeChange**r, which uses voice, video and collaboration technologies to [provide people with physical disabilities and mobility issues with greater access to meaningful careers](http://hrexecutive.com/chance-to-succeed/). What started as a novel idea by a passionate group of employees has evolved into a movement at Cisco, resulting in a best practice for other companies to emulate. Facilitated by [Cisco’s LifeChanger program](http://www.diversityjournal.com/16576-cisco-project-lifechanger/), nearly 100 new employees have been hired so far, with more planned. A case study conducted as part of a LifeChanger pilot from Bangalore demonstrated 120% higher efficiency—or 2.2 times more productivity – than their co-workers without disabilities, including lower error rates, lower turnover and higher retention than peers without disabilities in similar roles.
  + Another winning prototype to emerge from the IEC is **Network Early Warning**, a predictive service that aims to eliminate unplanned network outages in businesses. The solution predicts problems in the network, then pre-empts those problems before they occur by leveraging machine learning. In tests, the team behind this innovative new solution were able to [predict a scenario](https://blogs.cisco.com/services/from-reactive-to-predictive-services-the-power-of-services-innovation) in a top U.S. bank’s network 32 hours before it would have caused a major outage, and took action to minimize the business impact.
  + Another winning solution, **Vaquero (formerly known as Rainmaker)** consists of a deadline-driven digital media logistics platform. The team co-developed the solution with a large Cisco customer, and it is now successfully in use by multiple Cisco Service Provider customers
  + Lastly, Team EVAR’s idea consisted of a suite of augmented reality / virtual reality services to enable Cisco collaboration inside the next generation of immersive apps. EVAR built a successful prototype, demoed to some of the largest industry players, including at Cisco Live Las Vegas, and started proofs of concept with some of them. The EVAR concept has now been transitioned to Cisco’s Emerge Group. Two of the original EVAR team members are now part of this group and continue to develop some aspects of their original idea as part of **SparkVR**.

These winning prototypes of new solutions that have emerged from the IEC have not only had measurable impacts on Cisco’s business operations, but are also being tested and adopted by customers, partners and other organizations, demonstrating their ability to transform business operations across industries.

* These results have served as proof points, helping Cisco leap from the 31st spot on Boston Consulting Group’s list of “most innovative global companies” in 2015, to the 16th spot in 2017, and jumped 20 points in the 2018 Dow Jones Sustainability Index for “Innovation Management.”