

Cisco
Padmasree Warrior; Cisco; Chief Technology Officer
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Peter Shaplen: Welcome to this podcast series, an ongoing conversation about trends, technology, and business for Cisco. I'm Peter Shaplen, and this is part 2 of a conversation I recorded in San Jose with Padmasree Warrior, Cisco's new Chief Technology Officer.

You have said you are more interested in the future, than in analyzing the past. And, speaking about yourself, have said, you will help shape Cisco's efforts to explore new technological frontiers in innovation strategies, that complement the network's role in transforming the way we work, live, and play. Sounds great. What does it mean?

Padma Warrior: I'm impressed with the brainpower and the creativity and the focus of people at Cisco. What I see so far is there's a lot of depth in technology. Mainly, pieces of technology, capabilities that we need to build that vision of where the network becomes a platform to change the way we work, live, etc.

Things like video, right? Now, how do you take our strength in video as a technology strength, and bring it more as a solution to the market, with visual networking? Visual networking is more than just downloading video and moving video from one place to another. It's really how do you interact with the information, with the images you're seeing, and how do you use that to improve your productivity. So things like telepresence allow us to do that. It's not just seeing who you are and having a nice conversation with you. I always enjoy talking with you, Peter.

Peter Shaplen: Thank you very much.

Padma Warrior: No, it's really how do we hold these meetings differently, where I can spend now, less time in airplanes, and more time actually working. That is one example of visual networking. That's one way we will change how people will live, and work. That's one example of it.

Peter Shaplen: Let's touch on that a little bit more. In a sense, we often interact by watching. We often interact by sitting. Not always passively, but more passively than perhaps actively. Are you speaking in the sense of getting people more engaged to use it as a tool. How do you define that? The word "interact" is really quite fascinating.

Padma Warrior: Yeah, of course, I think it is more about not just consuming data, or moving data from one place to another, but it's really engaging while you have the data in a discussion. It's actually, I would say, moving from data to information to decisions, and participation, right? I cited the example of telepresence. But there's also WebEx, a company that Cisco bought few months ago. A great technology.

And you can say, "well, the technology is really about having a collaborative way to work together," but that platform we can use to deliver other services. And so WebEx Connect as a platform, allows us to provide additional services that'll encourage people to do things

differently, in terms of how they work, and then you can think about extending that into a mobility space, where you can now not just have a meeting sitting in a room, but take that session with you as you move about.

Peter Shaplen: So there's any number of opportunities where we can leverage the strength we have in, in terms of technology, and build this future that we talk about in our vision.

It leads naturally to the next question. You can talk to people about these. You can show them. You can try to, to plant a hook, and, and lure them in. You've said one of your goals is to strengthen relationships with key constituents, including customers, analysts, partners, suppliers, investors, media, industry organizations, and governments around the world.

This work will better position Cisco as an industry leader that innovates to meet real-world challenges. Sounds like a U.N. speech. How do you do it?

Padma Warrior: I've been here 3 months, and the first month I went to Dubai. I met with several of the government officials there, many of our customers, our team members. I talked at a conference that was focused around innovation and entrepreneurship. I was recently in New York. I met with the CTO of a very large financial institution which is a customer of ours. And together we, we brainstormed about what the future might look like.

We spent a lot of time talking about our current products, and what we can do to improve them. But we also spent a substantial amount of time on the future of where this industry is headed. What thing are challenges for him as a CTO of his company, and what things are challenges for me as a CTO of this company. Then I was in Hawaii, at a partner summit that we had recently. And I was talking to one of our largest channel partners. And the CTO was there.

And we discussed the role of the CTO. Because I'm new to this role as a CTO at Cisco. I've been CTO for roughly half of my career. He was taking on additional responsibilities as CTO. So, you can see the conversation varies very broadly from globalization in Dubai, you know, organization and the challenges, and the opportunities for technology there, to financial services, how that industry is going to move, to simply the role of a CTO.

It's doing those kinds of things that will help us not just become a better innovator as a company, but spread our message across the board. And by the way, it's not just me doing all the talking. There's a whole team of 60,000 people in Cisco that can all be evangelists of the Cisco vision. And that's one of my goals, is to get the whole company excited about the vision that John has outlined, and get us all excited as the evangelists to put that vision forward.

Peter Shaplen: Let's do the same. I want to do that again. Not because there was anything wrong with that. But I want to come at it again another way. I am picking that up in 3, 2, 1. How does one go about strengthening relationships with key constituents? Because you have so many. And just off the top of my head, we're talking customers, and analysts, and partners, and vendors...media. The list, of course, is a vast one. Do you brainstorm?

How do you brainstorm? What are you listening for when you meet these folk, and you're beginning this relationship and this dialect. I want to know what you do when you brainstorm.

Padma Warrior: I think it's a 2-way process. It's never one-way, "here's my vision of the

future, and this is what I think.” My approach always, especially with customers, is to sit down and jointly discuss what the challenges are, and what the changes we see structurally in the industry, but also driven by technology (destruction?). So recently, I was in a meeting with the CTO of one of the largest financial institutions in New York, who happens to be a large customer of ours.

And we talked not just about today’s products, and how we can both execute, especially Cisco, how we can execute better to meet their needs. I talked to him about his views on what’s going to change in the future. I shared with him my views, and in some areas we agreed, in some areas we did not agree. And that’s OK because no one has a crystal ball to say “this is how the world’s going to look like in the next 5 years.” I wish we did, but none of us do. I think many of the CTOs recognize that.

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And so, a CTO, especially CTOs in large companies, are looking for idea sharing, and knowledge sharing, and, and that’s the kind of approach I take, especially with customers.

Peter Shaplen: Cisco has historically been an infrastructure company. I mean, using your own words, “an engineering machine. A plumber for internet pipes.” It’s clearly changing. What do you see coming? What do you see coming, and how are you going to help it get there?

Padma Warrior: There’s a lot of changes that we are anticipating happening, and are actually positioned well to take advantage of. One is in terms of market shifts, where emerging markets and globalization creates a huge opportunity. Looking at markets just beyond the U.S, I would say. We have a huge emphasis in that, in not just taking advantage of the market, but actually leveraging the talent base that’s out there and delivering solutions that are not just for one region of the world, but as we develop solutions in India or China, how can we take them to the Middle East or Africa.

You know other emerging markets as well. So that’s definitely one shift that we’ll be making. The second has to do with actually looking at different types of business models. With WebEx, it’s really a software as a service business model, which is different from, traditionally, what Cisco has done with switching and routing. I think we have to be careful though, when we say we want to transition the company. The message is not that we leave what we are good at.

Often, great companies compromise their strength by wandering too far away from their core. And I don’t want people to misunderstand the message here. We are very strong in understanding the network, and understanding the enterprise, and providing solutions with our switching, routing, security, there’s a lot of strengths that we have. The challenge we have is how do we build on those strengths? That’s where I think the future focus is going to be.

Peter Shaplen: How do you build on them? How do you determine what to build?

Padma Warrior: It’s to the way that you build on them is to really look at adjacencies, and

understand that there are destructions that will occur. And getting the timing right instead of where the markets are going to shift, and how. And there's no real science behind it. It's an iterative process. It's working with the customers to understand what their needs are, and making sure we are prepared with those solutions to do that.

Peter Shaplen: You're still in your first 100 days. Somewhat fresh. There must have been things about Cisco that you looked at from the outside that you both liked, perhaps envied, perhaps you viewed them as weaknesses. And now, of course, you have a different view, having been here, admittedly 3 months, plus a little. Tell me a little bit about each.

Padma Warrior: From the outside what I admired really about Cisco is their focus on execution. Their understanding of customer needs. And the tremendous, tremendous sales and channel strength that they have both in terms of the talent and the processes. That's what really drew me to Cisco. Coming inside I find all that to be true and more. There is a lot of innovation in this company, and we need to start positioning it in terms of making sure that people understand what Cisco has innovated and how.

Because I think that's going to be important going forward in the future. The areas that we have to work on, like any big company, Cisco has got a lot of challenges in terms of how do we get people to not think in just silos, and how do we get people to break out of their silos, and work horizontally across the organization. How do we start making decisions quickly. Because as a company gets larger, it's important to have a process for decision-making, because without process then there'll be chaos, and actually the decision-making process gets to be longer than shorter.

But at the same time, you don't want the process to get too bureaucratic, and how do you maintain the agility as the company starts to grow. I think that's another area of challenge for us, and we have to start dealing with that. And, the third thing is to start thinking more about solutions. End-to-end solutions, rather than just products and point applications. So I think those are the three areas that I hope I can contribute.

Peter Shaplen: This is a tough one, because it's like asking a mother which is her favorite child, so I'll ask you as a CTO: which of the silos, which of the products, which catches your eye the most and why?

Padma Warrior: Wow, that is a tough question! In terms of a current product? Or in terms of where the future is going to be?

Peter Shaplen: Well, you opened the door, let's take one of each.

Padma Warrior: I think in terms of the current strength, there is a lot of knowledge in this company about understanding how to make the internet work. Whether it's security, whether it's routing, whether it's switching, incredible, incredible strength in terms of that. That's, I think, my favorite part. Going forward it's going to be about shifting to more applications, more services especially software as a services and other applications, like collaboration.

I think of collaboration as an application. So what we are doing with WebEx, what we are doing with telepresence, what we are doing with visual networking and video. All those things are exciting to me.

Peter Shaplen: As you look forward, and with that vision, I am curious to gauge a little bit

more of your past. Who is a business hero?

Padma Warrior: I don't think I have any single individual that I hero-worship. I think I have several traits, perhaps, that I really admire. So, if you were to ask me for some of the traits that I admire in people, it's people that have a vision. People that have a passion. Business leaders that have a passion. Business leaders that are risk-takers. Business leaders that are inclusive. I don't like businesspeople that have big egos, where it's the whole organization is tuned to feeding a leader's ego.

I dislike that. What else do I like? I like people that are humble, in the sense that there, there's a hunger to learn constantly in the leader. Those are some of the traits that I admire.

Peter Shaplen: Do those extend beyond the inside the company, the internal view. Do those extend to customers and to all of your constituents?

Padma Warrior: Absolutely. I think a leader is fundamentally a human being. So I think, you know, there are, these are all human traits, right? I think so, as human beings, how we lead is very close to how we live. And then, you see that in companies as well. Companies are nothing but a collection of individuals. These traits absolutely extend to how I view outside influences.

Peter Shaplen: If you invite us back to have a conversation in a year's time, what do you hope we'll be talking about?

Padma Warrior: I hope we'll be talking about Cisco as the iconic innovator. I hope we'll be talking about the new things that Cisco has created. I hope we'll be talking about new markets where Cisco has gone and provided very different solutions that didn't exist before.

Peter Shaplen: Will you invite us back?

Padma Warrior: Of course.

Peter Shaplen: Thank you very much. Padmastree Warrior, the new CTO of Cisco. And thank you all for listening as well. Again, a reminder: this was part 2, and I hope you'll want to listen to part 1 of our conversation, both about the job, and the woman. And, an archive of that, as well as other podcasts, both audio and video, can be found online, on the network, at Newsroom.Cisco.com. I'm Peter Shaplen for Cisco. Thank you.