Beyond the Network: IT in the Regions

Sometimes the most important part of a job isn't in the job description. Consider the special role of a group of technical experts within Cisco's global IT organization. Unlike many of their peers, they're not based at a large campus and working among hundreds of other IT employees. They're deployed at small sites and to local users they're essentially the chief information officer, doing everything from troubleshooting broken conference room equipment to supporting the network to meeting with external customers to talk about how Cisco IT tackles business challenges. They're required to understand local languages and customs, as well as stay up to date on shifting legal and geo-political dynamics that affect Cisco employees and their customers in the countries, they conduct business in.

Arthur Woo explores a day in the life of a regional IT employee by talking with Diego Barrozo, who leads Cisco IT operations and customer engagements in Latin America. Listen as they go beyond the network.

Arthur: "And I hope I got your last name correct so, can you teach me how you, I want to make sure I get people's names correctly."

Diego: "It's a little bit complicated, it's kind of a Spaniard last name. The right way to say it is "Barrozo"."

Arthur: "Barrozo" kind of roll the R"

Diego: "You have to put emphasis on double R. And it is with Z right I mean there is a lot of Barroso out there with S, but the origin is a Portuguese last name, mine is Spaniard."

Arthur: "Ah wonderful great thank you for that I always want to respect people's name so I'm going to practice some more next time."

Diego: "Thank you thank you"

Arthur: "I'll try and roll the R more next time."

"So hey, let's talk about your role down in Latin America. Can you talk about maybe the region itself and what it looks like. Give us a view of the scope of the places that you have to cover and the things around that."

Diego: "Yeah absolutely. For those of you that doesn't know Latin America so much let me tell you starting that, Cisco has presence in 15 countries across Latin America. We do business in all of those countries. We have 24 offices across all of those countries. In some countries we have just a one office just one small team in the office. In other ones we have more than one. All of that I mean the whole of Latin America from a sales perspective is divided into four sub regions. It's going to be Mexico is one, Brazil is the another one. And these 2 are countries slash regions, two sub-regions because of the size. Because of the volume of the sales they have.

The other two regions are composed of multiple countries. The first one is called MCO or Multi country operation, which is pretty much countries in the South American continent. Which is going to be Chile, Uruguay, Paraguay, and Colombia as well. And the other one is my favorite of course, it's the one I am assigned to it's called the CANSAC region. CANSAC stands for (Central America, North/South America and the Caribbean). And it covers these ugly places like Dominican Republic, Cuba, Costa Rica (laughter), all of those nice places that I usually visit and I spend some time with my friends over there.

And across these regions, across the entire region we manage 2 languages. The main language is Spanish like everybody knows. Brazil is the only country speaking in Portuguese. So, my team and myself we are representatives for all of the IT Services and Solutions down here we have to adapt everything to the local needs including the language, right?

So, we have to speak the local languages. We are pretty much fluent in Portuguese. Most of the Spanish speaking guys we are pretty much fluent in Portuguese. There is a joke that Brazilians and the rest of the guys do, because there is a middle language and we call it Portuñol which is a mixture between the Portuguese Brazilian and the rest of the Spanish speaking languages across Latin America.

And that's funny because when somebody is learning each other's languages, you reach out to a level of comfort when you reach Portuñol level that means you can communicate with somebody else and understand what they are saying and actually try to speak something about it.

So, it's funny and that's been working for many years for us and its great. It's great because it gives us opportunity to interact with more than 3000 users across Latin America every single day."

Arthur: "And you speak Portuguese and Spanish I take it?"

Diego: "I do I do. I am not an expert in Portuguese, but I do, but I consider my level haha some people in Brazil consider my level is good which I am ok with that haha. So I would interact with.

We have one of my team members of course Brazilian he is Portuguese native, so he is our savior in those situations especially when we have to talk to a customer in that language. But like you said in the beginning we are the IT face down here, and we have to represent all the services and solutions that Cisco delivers to our final users down here. And like you said we need to work in these four regions all the time with all of the challenges that they have.

Because sometimes you can say hey its easy right? You just grab a service and implement in your country and that's it. Sometimes, you can do this depending on the country, but other times you don't. Because countries some of them have complexity in terms of local regulation. In terms of for example customs, when we had to be involved with some gear.

In case of delivering business because some specific social, economical, or political situation, I'll give you a live example we are doing a great great effort to deliver services in Venezuela. It's a complicated environment there, but still we managed to deliver services. When it's a service that includes these complicated things like delivering a laptop there for example or to deliver a new internet service for the office right? Or a sending another piece for something that became broken or making a fleet upgrade. Normal things that we usually do every single day. But in some situations, it takes a lot of time, it consumes a lot of time to deliver because of the complexity that we have."

Arthur: "So, what I'm hearing is, it's not even just a technical challenge getting access, or bandwidth, or computing power. I mean that's maybe part of it, maybe half of it. But it's all of these other country specific things or local specific things that you have to deal with. Like like you said policy, compliance, local laws and regulations, social and political that you have to take into effect.

It's not even you know, the technical challenges is one thing, Let's say for example you've solved the technical thing, but you have all these other things that you have to worry about because it's the law or the rule and you have to either work through it or work around it is what I'm hearing."

Diego: "Totally and uh let me tell you on my team we are all engineers, but we find ourselves working in different things that does not have anything to do with an engineer role. And here is where relationships came up right?

We have a saying in Latin America. We say make relationships first then do business. So, we usually you know, we are very friendly people, we try to get relationships, we try to get friends first and then we start talking about business, about the job. And we use that as our very own we use that to the outside. We try to make relationships with service owners and with the responsibility of delivering these services in order to be successful with our engagements.

For example, something so easy like paying an invoice to a supplier, that takes time. And that takes sometimes our help because we need to struggle with exchange rate differences. We struggle with the fact that some countries doesn't accept by law electronic invoicing by example.

Many complexities that you have to keep in mind, I'm sure that some guy is listening to me right now in EMEAR or AsiaPac and perhaps encounter the same thing, but here in Latin America it's pretty much a normal day to do business.

And yeah other examples are customs. That is something that always takes us, not every single country has the same custom regulations, so every time that you send me or somebody sends me some equipment from the US to perform a network upgrade, or something, we have to be there. We have to be there following up with the entire process, making sure that the we have the proper documentation, that we have everything needed to clear customs and to receive the equipment in the office and install it.

And again, we make these alliances and relationships with the service owners in order to ensure they understand our complexity, we are facilitators for that, we explain that, we are here to help and to make their life easier for them. At the end of the day it's going to be a win-win right because the service owner finally delivers the program my users are going to receive, the new services or new benefits in this case."

Arthur: "I really liked the fact that you called that because otherwise how can you get through these technical and social and political and local challenges if you don't get along right?

So, question for you there is when something happens or how do you build these relationships? Does it only happen when something is broken? And it's like oh who do they call? Do they just call Diego or your team? Or do you have to also actively go out and meet people and start to build the relationship for other things? Or is it a little bit of both?"

Diego: "It's a little bit of both. Of course, we have all this, we try to do these interlocking initiatives that we run as a team, in order to get to know each other. Who is who in IT Cisco is a huge organization. There are many actors there are many people, many important people that we need to know. These interlocks help us to understand how these services work, who are responsible for those services. We start to create these relationships these alliances in order to get the support. Also, when something is broken of course we make these tiger teams with my team with the people responsible for fixing things and we create and try to solve the issue as fast as possible. And let me tell you we have issues every single day every single day. Especially in the network area this is because again of complexity, poor infrastructure in some countries, lack of power in in some areas, quality of the cables, quality of the service providers.

We need to work with constantly IT Infrastructure, The IT Infra team is one of our most appreciated friends we can say. Because we work with them pretty much every single day solving issues.

On the other hand, every time we travel, because we have a lot of travel included in our job, we have to visit these countries. We have to make these relationships at the local level as well because we are not present in every single country physically. Sometimes we need extra hands, or we need a friend. We need this friend that could be usually the lab admin or some SE or sometimes depending on the size of

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the country the sales manager. Or somebody that help us help us sign in on our contract, help us receive gear, help us walk a supplier inside the office. Help us paying an invoice or making sure the invoice is paid, I mean a lot of help that is needed, not only like you said from the IT world in the service area but also the local leads at each of the local offices."

Arthur: "So out of curiosity do you also have to interface, or do you have to reach out to people outside of Cisco in order to get things done perhaps sometimes? Like local governments or a local public company? Because you talked about infrastructure so that involves access and power and networking and those are sometimes things beyond yours or Cisco's control."

Diego: "Yeah yeah for example let me give you an example, many years ago Costa Rica doesn't have regulations in communications systems, so cell phones were government owned. So, I remember those days a new hire came into the office and asked for a cell phone and had to sit down and wait for months for that phone to be delivered. So, we used our relationships of course there must always be a government or public sector account manager that has contact inside the government, so we use those contacts to make things happen faster right? Or to make sure that things happen or what do we need to do in order to deliver faster right? That's an example, an example could be not government, but private entities Cisco in Latin America doesn't not own the buildings where we are. So, we have to deal with landlords at the time that we need to deliver a service to users in the office. Some landlords don't want us to I don't know run a fiber or do something in the ceiling. Sometimes it's complicated in that case we work very closely with Workplace Resources (WPR) and our other friends to make this happen right? To make these negotiations to try to do speed up things in order to make it happen.

So yes, also suppliers as well distributors not all of the Cisco gear or brands Cisco uses inside IT are represented in the countries. Imagine I don't know I remember one funny thing that was, I remember the AED units those that are used for emergency? It was funny because the company that Cisco decided to use to procure the gear was not present in all of the countries. And since that has to do with health, it has to pass a lot of controls with the Minister of Health, with government, etc. It took us time. You say what does that have to do with IT? I mean it has, it's us. They ask so we help. At the end of the day it's us helping WPR to pass those controls and everything so yeah yeah, it's pretty interesting in that area.

So, as you can see, we spend a lot of time in operations. In making operations happen at the same time."

Arthur: "Cisco on Cisco is an internal IT function focused on sharing Cisco IT stories to customers at places like our Executive Briefing Centers (or EBCs for short), industry events like Cisco Live, and virtually using collaboration technologies. Along with managing IT operations, Diego talks about how he and his team must also support the Sales organization, by interfacing with and sharing Cisco IT stories with customers."

Diego: "Yeah with the Cisco on Cisco program, we get to call out a lot of things. Some of the people in the region know the program and use the program actually especially when they do an EBC in San Jose or something they usually use the Cisco on Cisco Program. But they were requesting us to be local language because they feel more comfortable. Some customers don't speak English. Again, especially in the public sector arena some of them doesn't speak English or they feel more comfortable with local language. So about three and a half years ago we started to develop the Cisco on Cisco program in Spanish and Portuguese.

And when I say we develop, I say we adapt all of the content, all the formats and everything into local language, including presentations. My team they had to train very very hard on the technologies and Cisco on Cisco stories to deliver the message. To deliver the message to our customers. We decided to split up the technologies, so we have an expert in each of the in one or more areas. It was a terrific success. I mean customers really adopted it, we started to use it especially in Mexico we had a lot of success. The program was very well received.

And the second piece is that, we usually when we started with this transformation into local language of course we use the corporate slides or the corporate stories, and the customers started saying "hey you

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show me these metrics which are great right, but these are global metrics. What about metrics from Rio de Janeiro? What about metrics for Santiago Chile right? What about local metrics? Because not all of the customers that we manage in Latin America has huge sizes to consider for example like the center that we have in Allen Texas. So, when you collect all of these metrics for things like WebEx calls for collaboration that we do every single month, that does not apply to a small company. So, we started to develop again with the help of service owners, we started to develop local metrics that can be applied to some specific situation in some country or some customer that is asking for that. Again, it's a huge success because the customers now say ok now this all makes a little more sense to me, it's more realistic to my reality or for the reality of my company or my country, that helps right?

The account managers or the people that do the engagements with us are very pleased with that they are very thankful to us for doing that. There is still a lot of things to do in that arena we keep working to make things happen and again with the help of everybody I think we are very successful."

Arthur: "And it just makes a lot of sense because relevancy, right? I mean people want, a lot of people rightly so, want it to be in their language and something that's relevant for them otherwise why should they care right?"

Diego: "Exactly"

Arthur: "I see the thing where you're talking about having to translate. It's one thing to speak the language but it's a different thing to translate a language and that's a lot of work especially when you are dealing with technical, technical jargon, technical topics, but you also have to take into account like slang or cultural type of ways of speaking or references. That's a tremendous a lot of work, so I'm just amazed that you also have to do that on top of everything else you have to do, so thank you for sharing that."

Diego: "And it is and the beauty of that is like I told you before Spanish is spoken in 90 percent of Latin America, but in every single site it's different. And when I say different it's the way that they use the verbs, the way that they use some words, some words have different meanings from one country to another. Even your body language when you move your hands, or something could be aggressive in some countries but could be funny in another even though it's the same gesture. So, you have to be conscious of that as well to make sure to do the correct translation.

For example, when we do Cisco Live in Cancun that is, we like to call "our" event because it's our favorite not for the place itself, but for the event of course."

Arthur: "Laughter"

Diego: "We do some translations over there for specific material that we deliver to our customers. When we do that we try to do as much neutral as possible in terms of the Spanish language because we know that content will be distributed to people from many countries, so we are very careful about that.

And also, right now we started doing some translations for customer service stories because we believe that's a powerful tool for account managers and sales managers trying to sell these new technologies and we have these stories that are great from a customer service perspective.

A couple of months ago we started with trying to translate the most relevant content and started to read in this one across our contacts in Latin America, so they can use that. It has been a nice acceptance in the beginning, but there is still a lot of work to do but we keep working on that, but I believe it's a good initiative."

Arthur: "As our conversation began to wind down, Diego's phone rang where he was told that employees in the office were having trouble connecting to the campus WiFi network. In addition, he informed me that he received a text message from an account manager, asking if he could meet with a customer from a local utility company to talk about collaboration technologies. Lastly, Diego said he still needed to follow-up on an email message he received from a recently hired sales manager, who was

having trouble setting up and provisioning his laptop and mobile device to the corporate network. It would certainly be a crazy day for many of us, but for Diego and his team, it's just another typical day for IT in the region."

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