



# KPMG in India's agility approach

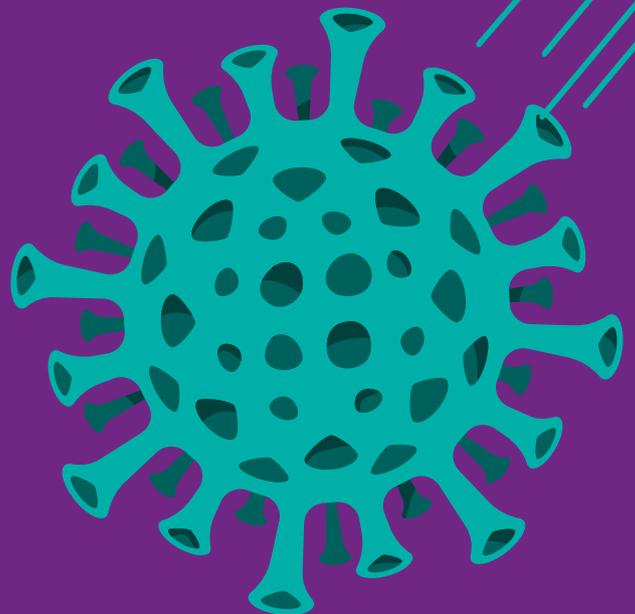
**A potential game changer for achieving  
process resilience in post COVID-19 times**

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What is happening around us now owing to COVID-19 has proved beyond any doubt that we live in a volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) world. Perhaps, we could add 'dangerous' also to the list and make it VUCAD, to represent the current reality. In such exceptional times, the priorities change for individuals, teams, organisations and governments. Businesses around the world are grappling for answers on handling disruption of such a high magnitude. This disruption has warranted a change in technology, the work environment, information security norms, people management, process

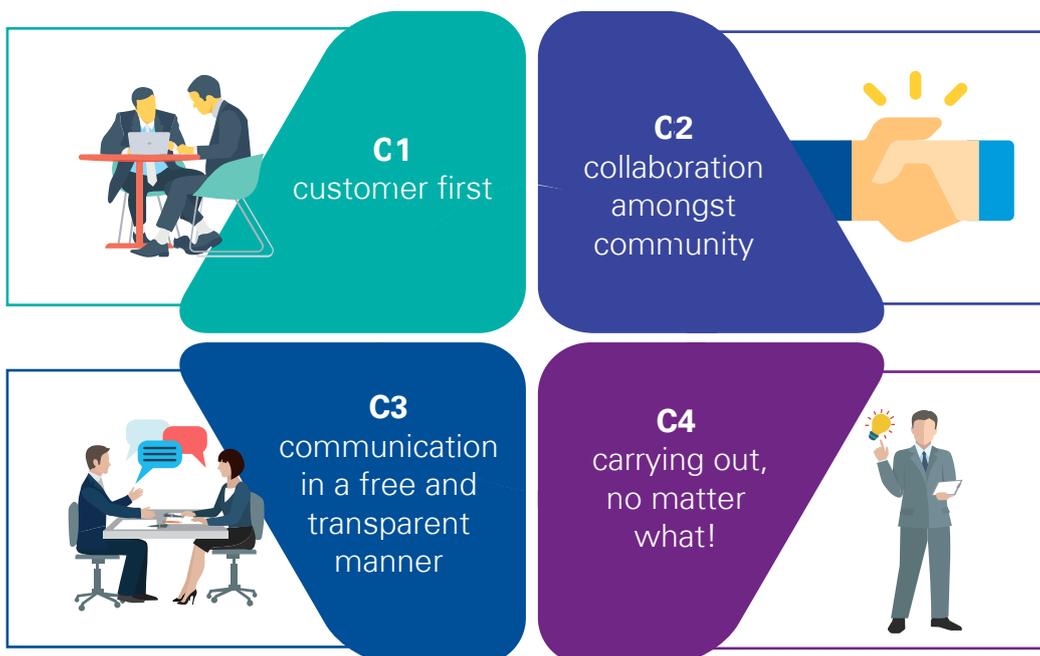
engineering, risk management and so on. The techniques and methods that used to work exceptionally well for organisations in certain conditions have become futile in the face of uncertainty, due to the change in circumstances such as travel restrictions, reduction in demand, invoking on business continuity plans etc.. It is in this context that traditional methods of delivery give way to unique, highly flexible and adaptive methods that can sustain and survive the tests of disruption and uncertainty. We wish to introduce a pragmatic, process-oriented and simple methodology for business excellence in uncertain times.

## Agile based approach

Simply put, the proposed approach is a set of tools, techniques and methods for maintaining and excelling business operations amidst uncertainty. Agility strives for discipline in operations, insights for adaptation and innovation in customer

delivery. It does not assume a perfect environment and system for delivery. Rather, the methodology adapts its practices based on the existing system and builds on top of it for delivery to customer, even in times of disruption and uncertainty.

### The essential principles of the approach are as follows.





# Building blocks of agility

The fundamental blocks of the methodology are its three phases namely 'rhythm in execution', 'insights for adaptation' and 'innovation in delivery'. These three blocks may be phased sequentially or may overlap

based on the nature and context and the process ecosystem of the organisation. Whichever be the case, each of the blocks builds on top of the preceding block.



## The phase of achieving 'rhythm in execution'



Organisations need to have an operational rhythm for execution. This rhythm comprises well-defined ceremonies and activities aimed at achieving cadence in execution among the stakeholders. In this phase, organisations establish the basic systems, including tools, processes and methods, which are standardised to the extent possible, giving provision for situations where out-of-the-box thinking might be essential. These standardised systems will help organisations to identify and act on disruptions in a quick manner.

### Guidelines for achieving rhythm

- **Progress monitoring:** daily virtual meetings, weekly progress reviews, monthly retrospective meetings, quarterly business evaluations, annual assessments
- **Visualisation:** information radiators as customised dashboards and stories
- **Gamification:** simplifying and gamifying development and delivery of lifecycle components (including requirement development, estimation, scheduling and monitoring and controlling tasks).

## The phase of using 'insights for adaptation'



Accurate and timely decision-making is at the core of steering a business towards success. The insights phase will use data-driven algorithms for highlighting the highs and lows of performance to decision makers on a timely basis.

### Guidelines for achieving insights

- **Predictive learning:** flagging off outliers in business performance with the help of machine-learning algorithms
- **Simulations:** forecast of decision-making to find best-case and worst-case estimates
- **Context-driven:** elaboration of contexts in quantitative and qualitative forms and ensuring the availability of live visual snapshots for instant references.

## The phase of 'innovation in customer delivery'



In the innovation phase, organisations constantly strive to improve on their status quo with the sole aim of maximising value with respect to customer and organisational expectations. Having robust and resilient processes, which can withstand the tests of disruption is key to achieving value and certainty in business.

### Guidelines for achieving innovation

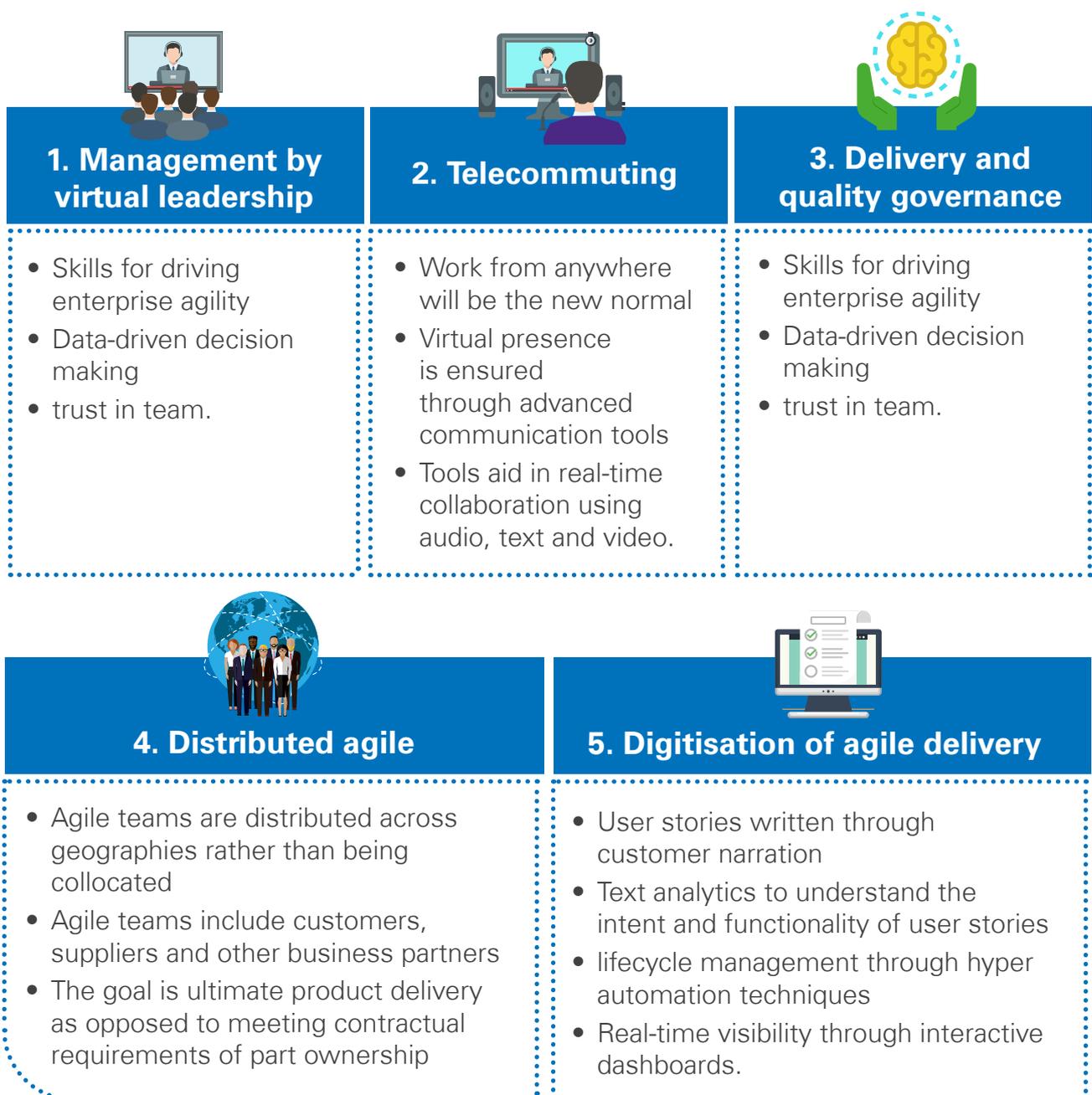
- **Process resilience:** building robust and redundant systems based on feedforward loops
- **Value delivery:** maximising value through periodic reengineering of practices
- **Change fervent:** instilling a change-ready mindset to the stakeholder community through mock drills and risk checks.



# Characteristics of the approach

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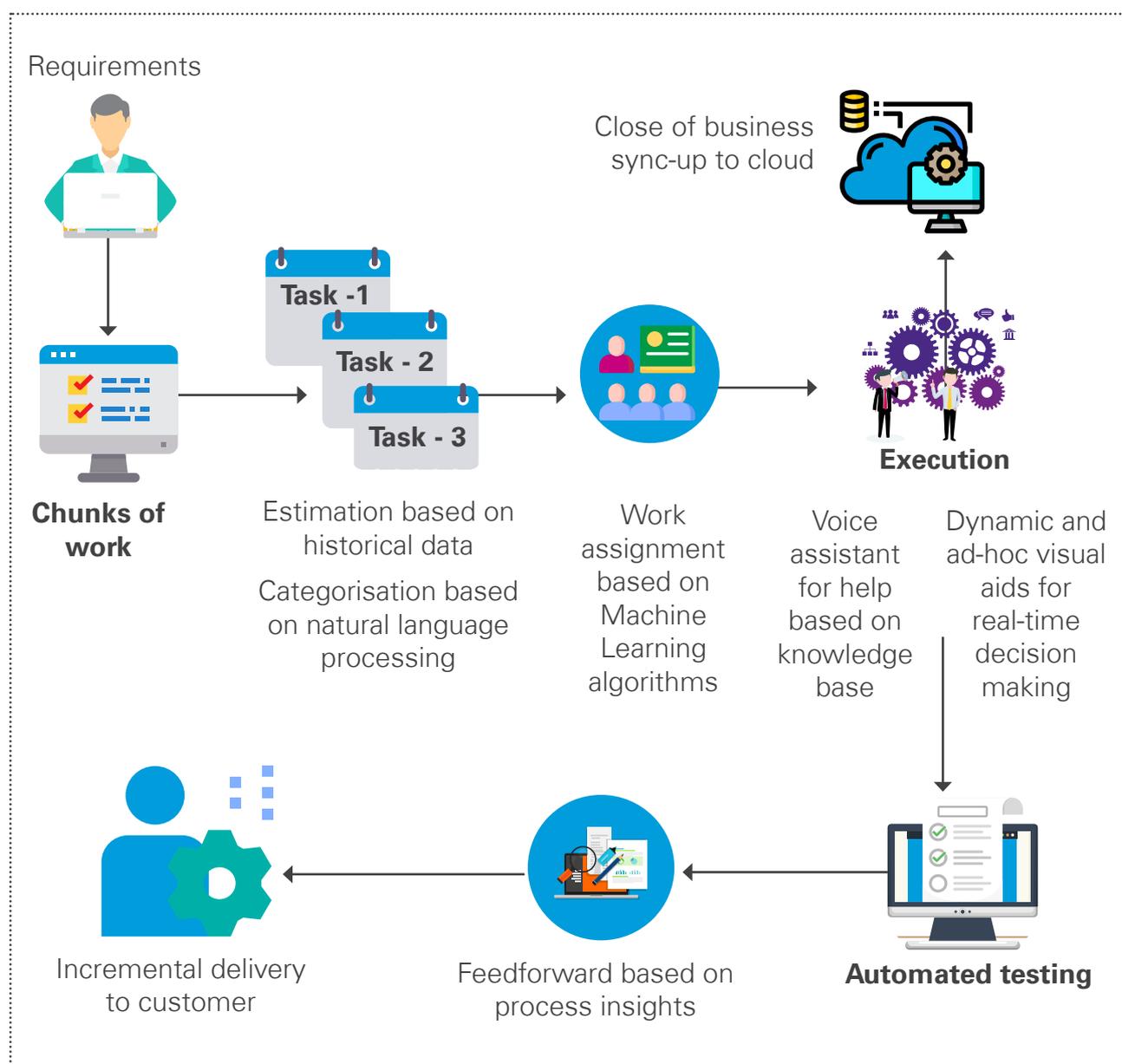
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# The agile execution model for delivery

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# Working guidelines to alleviate business uncertainty

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## 1. Coaching style leadership

- a. A true leader can make a difference in a virtual work environment by guiding the team, setting optimum targets, being clear-headed, relying on data rather than perceptions for making decisions and leading by doing. Some of the traits for virtual leadership may be inherently different from that of traditional leadership. One needs to be a firm believer and practitioner of the servant leadership philosophy to be able to successfully lead a virtual organisation.



## 2. Decluttered workflows

- a. Distributed teams struggle dearly with complex and obese workflows. Agility works well when organisational-level workflows, especially workflows related to employee management, configuration management, data security and risk management, are made simple and collaborative.



### 3. Gamification of requirement development process

a. The gap between a customer's expectations and the requirement specification is always an area of concern. A distributed workforce will intensify this problem. Conventional requirement specification practices may not work well in a virtual business environment. Agile requirements models and practices such as backlogs, user stories, feature-driven approach, test-driven development, breadth-first approach and lean documentation practices have simplified the requirement collection process. The process of requirement development is,

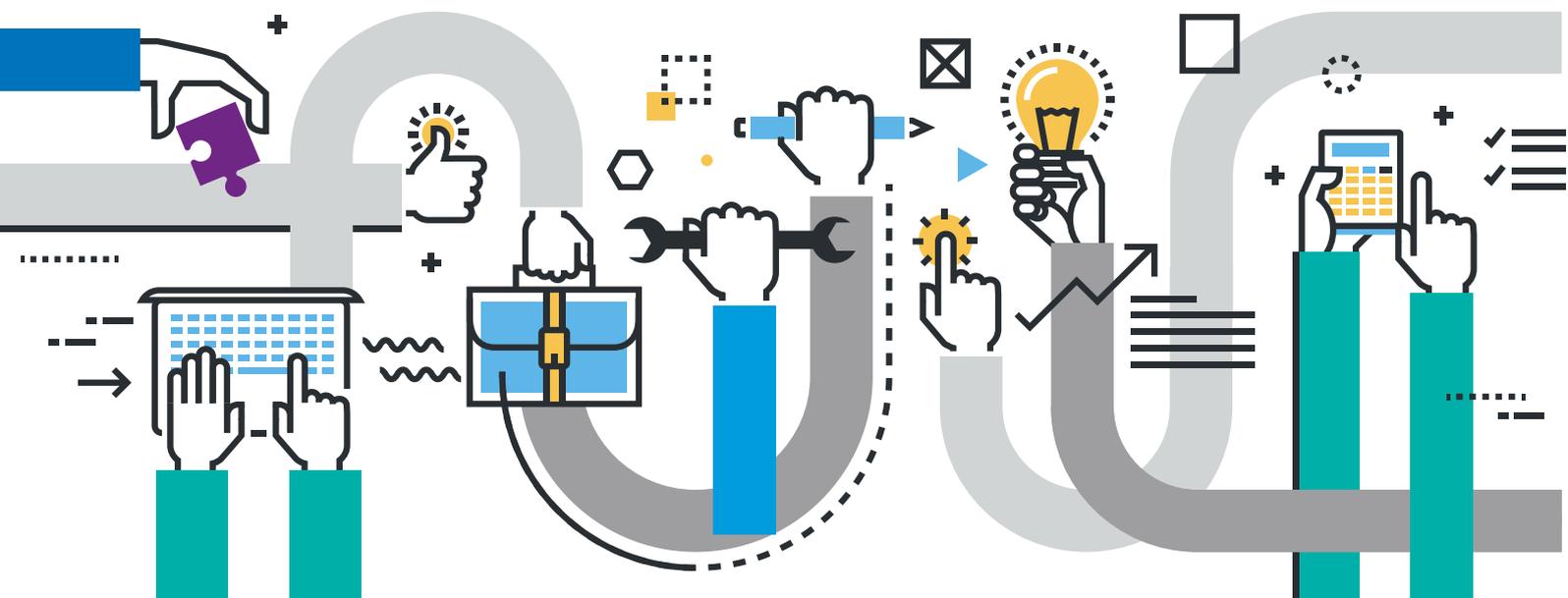
however, still something that is dull and time consuming. Agility proposes 'gamification of requirements development' as an answer. A user story generation game using visual elements, utilising building block concepts will enhance customers' visibility to the different aspects and challenges of the requirements. The development team will also have better clarity of the requirements that are being developed. Utilising parables is also found to be very effective in requirement development.



### 4. Gamification of agile boards

a. Live kanban boards and live burn down/burn up charts may be used for real-time updates.

b. These dashboards can be the opening screens of respective laptops and shouldn't be intimidating and need to be comforting and insightful.





## 5. Personalised meetings

- a. Asking each person in the meetings about their current mood and ensuring compassionate consideration of each person's emotional status through an emotion-detector game
- b. Rigid meeting hour to flexible work hours
  - i. Daily scrum meetings or weekly review meetings need to be at a precisely defined time. Each member of the team should attend this meeting without exception. The working hours, however, need to be flexible. Specific milestones can be defined to ensure progress.
  - ii. Time zone differences need to be considered while arranging meetings.
  - iii. Shorter meeting cycles - daily scrum meeting should be over within 30 minutes. Except the monthly, quarterly and annual meetings, no meeting should exceed one hour.
  - iv. Ensure video conferencing to see faces and emotions, and not just voice.
  - v. In a work-from-home environment, people may choose to appear casual. Respecting these preferences would be a motivating factor. Each team, however, can decide to have 'formal dress days' or 'theme dressing days' during their delivery cycles. This needs to be decided after getting consensus from all stakeholders – including the customer representatives.



## 6. Online estimation games

- a. Customised poker games can be used to play planning poker for task estimation. If someone finds exceptions in the estimation criteria, they should be able to point it out.
- b. Each task should have mandatory re-estimation performed.



## 7. Pair work within scrum

- a. An individual when working alone would find it quite difficult to cope up with changes or even tracking his or her tasks with precision. A pair work system wherein two members of the team working together on cohesive tasks will increase productivity in the long run. In the team meeting, the pair can answer queries together.



## 8. Ensuring appropriate devices and infrastructure to each of the stakeholders

- a. Portable laptops with longer battery life.
- b. Availability of an internet dongle to all the stakeholders.
- c. Availability of supporting devices.
- d. Collaborative online workspaces.
- e. Pre-installed video conferencing and meeting tools.
- f. Pre-installed data security and cybersecurity tools.
- g. Live supporting teams, if possible 24/7.



## 9. In a work-from-home environment, often personal time will be merged with work hours. This will eventually be damaging to the health and motivation of the workforce.

- a. To avoid this, there can be specific guidelines to avoid work at a precise time frame. E.g., no work hours from 06:00 pm to 09:00 pm or no work during 07:00 am to 09:00 am, based on the team and customer preferences. If a person wants to work on this timeframe, he or she should get prior approval to get system access. This shouldn't be an organisational directive but a team decision. Organisations should ensure that each team defines its free hours without exception.
- b. Mandatory scheduled breaks. E.g., no system access from 01:00 pm to 1:30 pm – lunch hour or warnings at every hour for taking five-minute breaks.
- c. Time outs or games can be planned within the team members. Team members can decide a day-out activity. It can also be a virtual team event out or even a virtual dinner.
- d. Health tracker forums can be initiated at an organisational level and group exercise challenges can be planned. For instance, using health apps or using wearable devices.



## 10. Time tasks without fail

- a. Scheduled events for task completion. Continuous integration and continuous deployment (CI-CD) systems can be used to ensure timely completion of sprints/tasks.
- b. Simplification of CICD tasks - a remote worker shouldn't find difficulties in starting or closing tasks or systems. This needs to be ensured at an infrastructural level.



## 11. An open approach to collaboration

- a. Collaboration is a central concept in any project and delivery management environment. It is even more critical as a theme in agility. It is vital to involve all stakeholders at the right time at the right place with the right intention and information to effectively utilise their part in the development and delivery lifecycle. When a stakeholder disconnects from the herd, the consequences are severe. It might damage the long and short-term objectives profoundly. When people work from distributed centres, the possibility of this disconnect is higher – especially for the stakeholders who are outside the core project team – namely vendors, suppliers, contractors and ally teams.
- b. An inbuilt chat and video conferencing facility and interface to project and organisation-level configuration systems and assets will be helpful for effective collaboration. Discussion forums, idea-converging rooms and technical support teams can facilitate effective exchange of thoughts and ideas.



## 12. Online innovation corners

- a. This can be divided into two categories namely project/service related and organisation related. This needs to be made simple and attractive and there should be provisions in the forum to scribble, such as using a drawing board, conduct piloting in coordination with team members or submit the innovations to the appropriate authority.

# A resolution to succeed

Organisations and its leaders need to be highly optimistic to be able to deal with uncertainty and disruption. In this VUCAD world, clear thinking, unconventional wisdom, effective tools, win-win relationships and compassionate leadership are vital to survive and excel. The proposed approach on agility provides the basic set of principles, guidelines, tools and

methods for demonstrating these traits. It is a redefined approach for a successful organisational dynamism in turbulent times. As with any other management framework, this is not a silver bullet that will make all problems to disappear overnight. But a true implementation of this methodology with grit can make a difference to organisations.



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