WORK FROM ANYWHERE MODEL

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The digital omnipresent workspace Point of View

The pandemic shook the IT industry rightly termed the Great fog of 2020. As industries pulled themselves by their boots and adapted to the changes, there has been ideas of emergence of newer working models, practices, roles and the like. This has also led to rethinking of traditional methods and mechanisms to prevent the "Golden hammer" anti-pattern in driving the changes. This is to ensure building of resilient organizations. Questions like "how many hours did an employee work" is getting changed to "how productive the employee has been" in delivering the outcomes. Statistics and research studies indicate that organizations that were mature in adoption of Agile practices and digital investments were able to adapt quickly with quality to these unprecedented changes. They also show the emergence of the hybrid virtual working model with different ratios of remote and co-located working. While the transition to this new way of "working from anywhere" is no minor challenge, this could well be a great opportunity for organizations to move to the new normal.

This change management needs to be driven the agile way considering changes in small increments moving towards a Live enterprise [1-2]. Agile leadership is required to drive these changes effectively. Leaders can leverage digital transformation via tools, creation of digitized virtual collaborative team spaces to bring cohesion & trust in teams, improve platforms backed by applied AI and cloud based solutions to make work from anywhere i.e. an omnipresent workspace a reality. Reskilling plays a crucial role for this transition to happen, with organizations using this as a tool to establish themselves as leaders in the knowledge economy. The investment in digital solutions is to be complemented with policy changes and promotion of distributed and scaled agile practices.

This article explains some of the recommended practices and represents our point of view to build omnipresent workspaces ensuring effectiveness of the "work from anywhere" paradigm.

The post-pandemic era – Emergence of work from anywhere model

According to industry sources, about one-third of organizations are replacing full-time employees with contingent workers as an endeavor to save costs. Research also points out that the COVID-19 pandemic has reset major work trends and remote working is here to stay. This has necessitated organizations to explore new methods of working to ensure business continuity. When the pandemic stuck, businesses went to quick action and brought in measures to allow remote working. Post the pandemic, as employees get back to campus, many industry experts are envisaging a hybrid workplace – a combination of home and office or remote and office. According to this new flexi model, employees would prefer to split their time between office and home instead of an either/or scenario. There may be other combinations of remote working too. Thus work from anywhere seems to become the new normal. Fig. 1 shows some industry statistics.

Gig economy
Organizations would replace full-time employees with provisional workers for cost optimization

Hybrid working
Emergence of a new work model, a combination of remote and office working

Employees may continue to work from home
Work from home (WFH)

One-third of team may be deployed on-premise on a rotation basis for selected kind of work
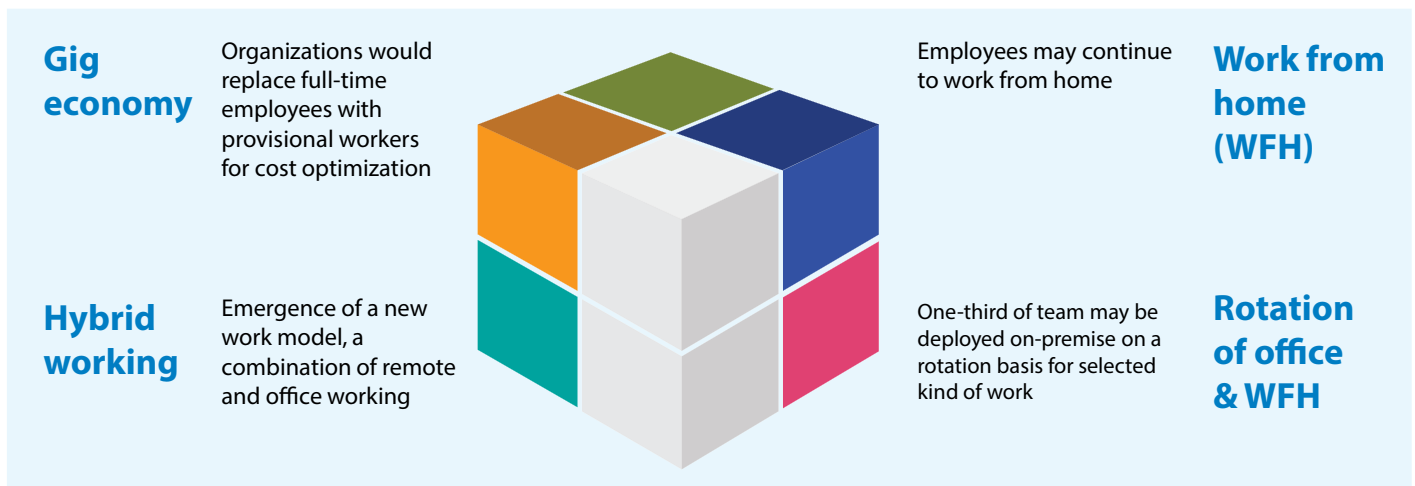**Rotation of office & WFH**

Fig. 1. Industry forecasted post-pandemic working trends

The key shift in trend / parameters that need to be considered as the hybrid working model finds its way to organizations are described as follows:

Conducive environment for increased remote working: There would be increase in remote working post the pandemic. There might be several combinations – teams may be completely remote, combination of few days of remote working with few days of campus working and the like. Challenges with respect to time zones, collaboration and scaling agile practices for remote working becomes important. Bringing about collaboration, conduction of ceremonies would need be looked at.

Transparency of data: The data for the project, teams etc will now be virtual. It becomes thereby important for teams to look at ensuring that data is available on demand and transparency. Consistent data sharing and transparency becomes therefore is the need of the hour. Following agile practices would promote the necessary transparency and boost agility in teams.

Flexi roles and workforce: Reports indicate that there will be roles that are new and employment of a floating workforce and gig economy[3]. This would mean that team members can change, so also traditional responsibilities would undergo a change.

Cross skilling and critical skilling: Investment in digitization has become a game changer for many organizations and hence changes are a given. To cater to these business changes and ensure ROI for clients, there is all the more need for cross skilling of teams leading to a flexi workforce.

Dealing with increased complexity: There would be increased complexity in the nature of work and organization strategies post the pandemic. This calls for quick reskilling and availability of a skilled workforce who can respond to this complexity in a smooth manner.

Inclusive working culture: It is important for organizations and teams to have an empathetic leadership and inclusive culture. This is required to address the challenges that the pandemic brings with it.

Build resilience and not efficiency: The earlier focus of organizations was efficiency. Post the pandemic this has shifted to building resilience and adapting to disruption with minimal impact.

The standpoints to be considered can be categorized with respect to work, work spaces and work force. This is summarized in fig. 2.

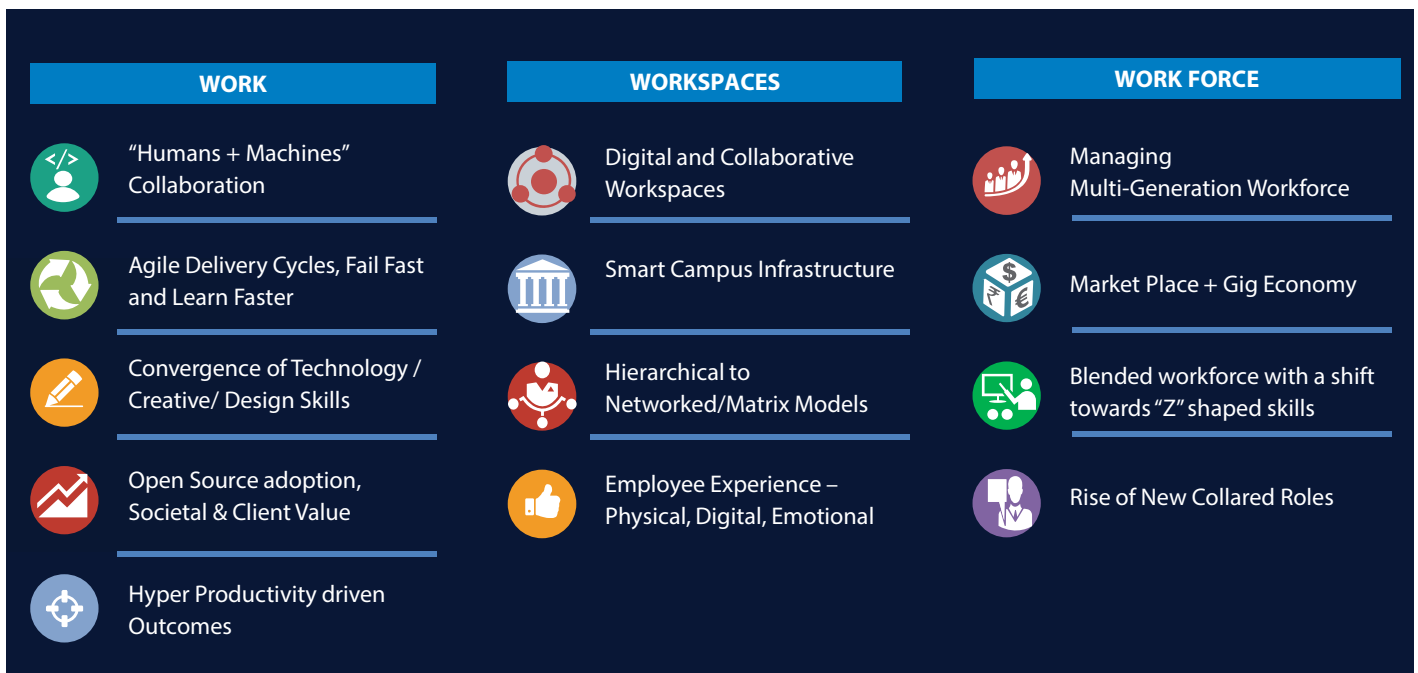| WORK	WORKSPACES	WORK FORCE
"Humans + Machines" Collaboration	Digital and Collaborative Workspaces	Managing Multi-Generation Workforce
Agile Delivery Cycles, Fail Fast and Learn Faster	Smart Campus Infrastructure	Market Place + Gig Economy
Convergence of Technology / Creative/ Design Skills	Hierarchical to Networked/Matrix Models	Blended workforce with a shift towards "Z" shaped skills
Open Source adoption, Societal & Client Value	Employee Experience – Physical, Digital, Emotional	Rise of New Collared Roles
Hyper Productivity driven Outcomes		

Fig. 2. Standpoints to be considered for the new work model

The subsequent sections would address these three categories, the challenges and the recommended practices for its mitigation leading to success.

"Talent acquisition, transformation and management are critical anchors for the growth of the industry"-

Nandan Nilekani,
Co-founder and Chairman of the Board, Infosys

Viewing the manifesto for Agile software development with a different lens

As illustrated in fig. 2, the work aspects include practices such as agile practices, faster delivery cycles using DevOps and adoption of open source considering societal and client value. The work aspects will also involve a collaboration between humans and machines so as to enhance each other's capabilities powered by AI. There may also be a technological convergence of creative, design and technology skills (ex. a mobile app). The work focus is also on hyper productivity based outcomes. Agile practices is one among the important levers to achieve this. Given this nature of work and paradigm shift, some of the oft mentioned essentials in agile –co-location, transparency and collaboration may seem to be a challenge. Pre-pandemic, Agile experts have always mentioned that co-location is mandatory to ensure collaboration between business teams and developers. This was preferred as co-located teams meet frequently which helps build trust, instant communication and quick decision making. It is also considered that the most efficient method of communication is a face-to- face one. This is aligned with principles 4, 5 and 6 of the manifesto for agile software development[4]. The manifesto was formed two decades earlier when the current collaboration tools were in their infancy stage. When teams got distributed and the term "distributed agile" came in, the ideas with respect to co-location also changed and the focus was on bringing the communication between the teams and best practices for conducting the ceremonies emerged. The distributed agile practices laid focus on staying true to the principles of agile leveraging the right team structure, cadence of ceremonies and leveraging technology for the communication advantage[5]. For example usage of application lifecycle management tools, collaboration tools and dashboards would help provide the necessary transparency and automation. It also laid emphasis on the mindset change that is required when distributed agile teams came together.

Fast forward, with the advent of the pandemic and the emergence of the work from anywhere model, the degree of distribution of teams is at its highest. We have distributed of distributed teams aka dispersed teams with each individual responsible and accountable for work being done. We have highly dispersed teams who are trying to work together towards a common goal from possibly distributed locations and time zones too. The agile practices of establishing rhythm, cadence for ceremonies, avenue for priority adjustments and empowered teams help the dispersed teams execute projects using the agile approach. All the practices laid out in distributed agile would definitely be applicable here too.

While that said, fig. 3 provides the challenges in bringing the work from anywhere paradigm

Fig. 3. Challenges posed by work from anywhere model

Trust: This is an important challenge as traditionally, co-location relatively helps in achieving trust. This is because there is tremendous potential for trust building when teams meet in-person through coffee catch ups and other informal meet ups versus meeting in a virtual manner.

Communication: Communication needs to be established with rigor when teams are in the remote mode. Teams tend to feel aloof and alone, possibly struggling with some common issues. It is also to ensure that there is parity when some teams are physical and others virtual. Hence, frequency, establishment of cohesion and communication from management becomes essential.

Social cohesion: The cohesiveness of teams due to co-location might need to be looked at. A lot of sharing happens when there is familiarity in teams. Team members open up and discuss problems better.

Empathy: Monitoring employees may become easier when co-location is there. With the shift in remote working, there are reports of sharp spike in workplace surveillance due to traditional ideas of using physical presenteeism as proof of productivity. This has led companies to go overboard in tracking employees remotely through various means, This may be harmful to the morale of employees. In the remote mode, ensuring productivity and completion of tasks with empathy is crucial.

The challenges mentioned can be addressed with the help of digital and collaborative workspaces as explained in the next section.

Digital Collaborative workspaces

As illustrated in fig. 2, the workspace aspects would include the collaborative workspace which emulates a good amount of physical workspace elements leveraging smart technology integrations to create a smart campus infrastructure. Workspaces also move from hierarchical to a more networked and matrix models. The workspaces should also cater to the physical, digital and emotional employee experience.

With the advent work from anywhere model, the additional challenge is the sustained affinity and cohesion between the dispersed teams. While the traditional collaboration tools may be valid , it may cause an

engagement fatigue. Such dispersed team need a virtual team space which can help them come together. This space would bind the teams at an individual level and at a team level too. This virtual team space needs to provide a forum for communication of individual emotions, provide a feeling of inclusiveness at the same time help feel the cohesion with the team through team events, celebrations, reaching out for help and means to work together. Such an experience should be integrated and teams should not feel the need to use different tools for varied activities. The attributes of a digital collaborative workspace is illustrated in fig. 4.
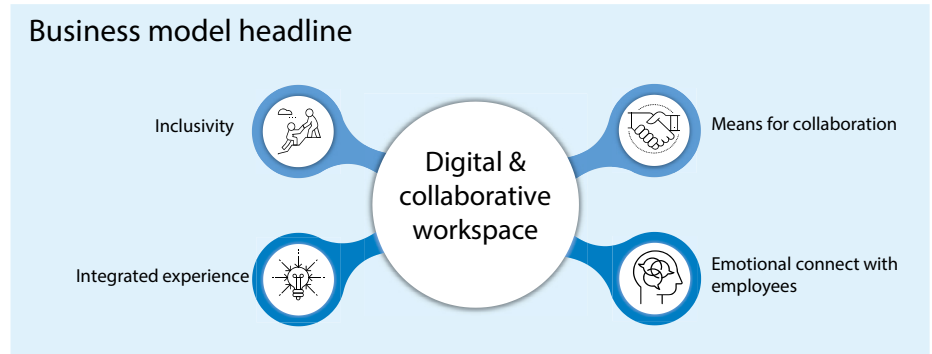

Fig. 4. Attributes of a digital collaborative workspace

The idea of an Infosys Live Enterprise workplace aims to provide an integrated experience to dispersed teams through the following –

Emulation of an individual workspace

- Visualize an individual space with personalized working area and related artifacts

- Centralize all learning links and notes

- Collaborate virtually with any team member

- Reach out to team members

Emulation of a collaborative workspace virtually

- Networking digitally with teams

- Use whiteboarding and perform agile ceremonies digitally and virtually with same impact

- Celebrate team achievements

- Conduct lobby conversations

- Connect with leadership

These virtual workspaces will ensure impactful remote working and bring in cohesion and trust in teams. An illustration of the differences between a physical office space to a virtual team space is shown in figure 5. It can be observed that the face to face collaboration is replaced with virtual means and an emulation of physical workplace with digital elements.

Digital cubicle

Digital communication with team

Digital gallary

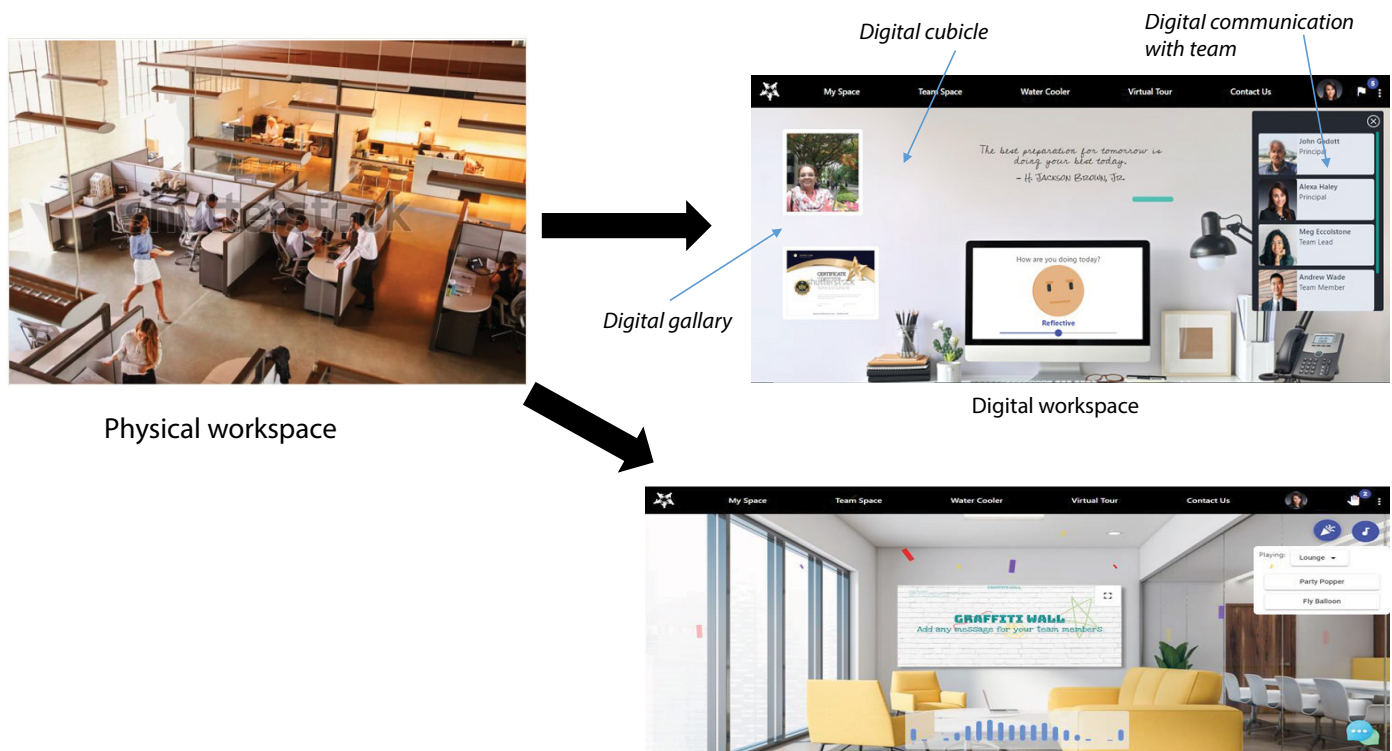Physical workspace

Digital workspace

Fig. 5. Illustration of the transition from a physical to a digital workplace

The values and principles of the manifesto for agile software development related to co-location and communication may be viewed with a revised lens. A possible interpretation is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Revisit of values and principles of agile

Values & principles of Agile approach to software development	Interpretation
Individuals and interactions over processes and tools	Brings teams together virtually to perform the interactions in a seamless manner
Business people and developers must work together daily throughout the project	Provide an integrated platform for collaboration, performing the ceremonies and coding together
Build projects around motivated individuals. Give them the environment and support they need, and trust them to get the job done	Provide individual virtual team spaces to remove engagement fatigue and motivate employees
The most efficient and effective method of conveying information to and within a development team is face-to-face conversation.	Promote face-to-face conversation means virtually with seamless tooling, infra and connectivity

These three principles point to bringing maximum collaboration between teams with the help of collaboration tools like Meridian. They bring the idea of remote first and sentient Enterprise Workplace Available anytime, anywhere, any device without any installation, needing only internet connectivity as shown below. Thus virtual workspaces like the Infosys Live enterprise workspace Meridian will help bring the necessary togetherness within dispersed teams and help them execute agile practices smoothly without having to switch to multiple tools and platforms.

This transition to the new way of working needs to be conducted in an incremental fashion and agile way. It would involve an agile approach addressing the changes in an incremental fashion. The next sections would describe the Microchange™ approach and the perspectives to be taken care in detail.

Microchange™ management approach

It is clear from evidence that hybrid virtual model involving work from anywhere is going to stay in various avatars. Hence transition to this new way of working requires a solid change management approach. There are several traditional change management models, the Kotter's Change Management Model, ADKAR Change Management Model to name a few. However, driving the change the agile way helps bridge the change management gap. Micro change with its inbuilt philosophy of agile thinking, is the way to achieve success, with the changes driven one micro step at a time and ensuring that the change management happens with each micro step[6].

Micro change uses three core concepts according to the Infosys Microchange™ management approach:

• Sigma of micro changes - Micro change interventions are carried out along with agile sprints, so that change occurs within the sprints

• Routine +1 - The change interventions are instituted bottom up, aided by changing the routines of impacted users in the as-is process (routine +1) and by providing the right cues, nudges, rewards, and recognition to change

• Behavioral change - The cues and rewards cause minor changes to routines and over the sprints they ultimately lead to a behavioral shift and an achievement of the desired outcome

The following levers need to be brought in for successful change management as shown in fig. 5 –

Fig. 5. Change management levers
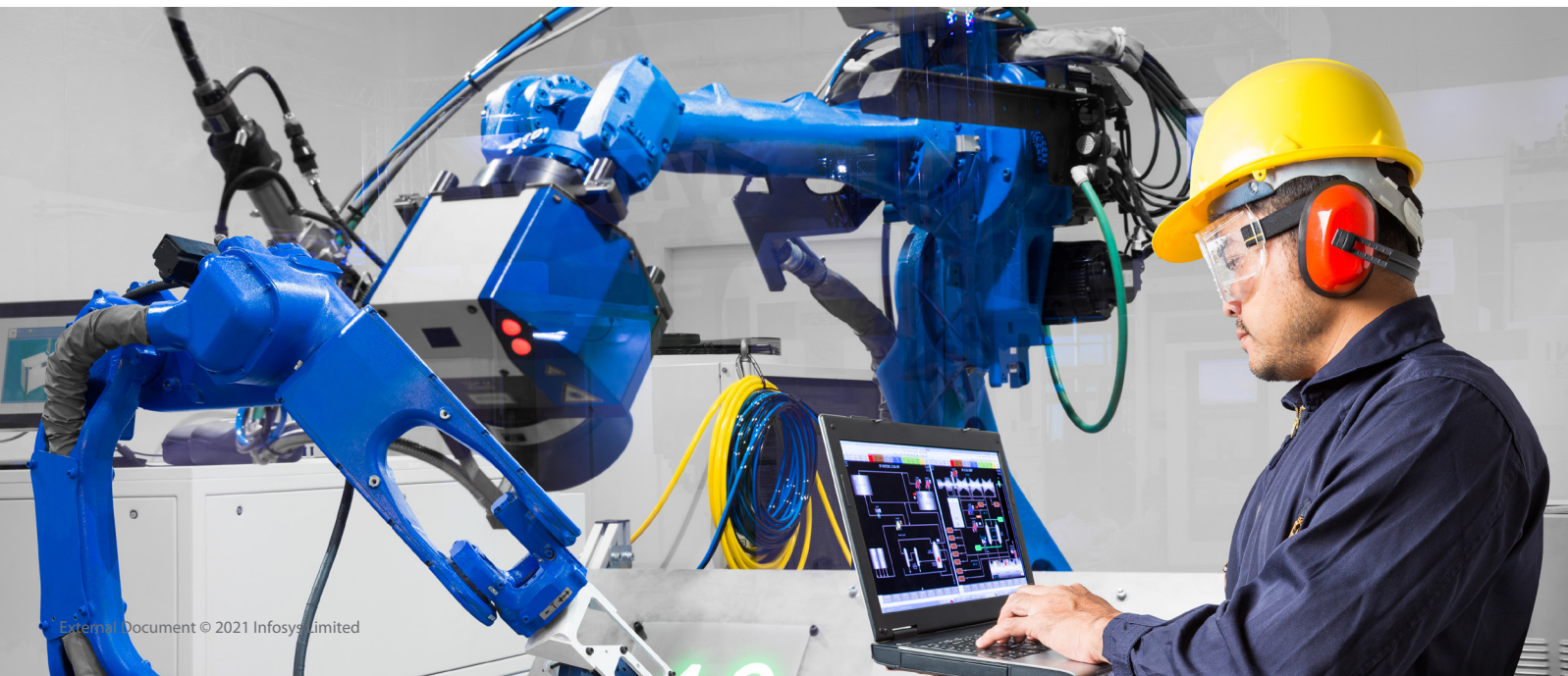
Communication strategies

Communication strategies have to be open, frequent and done at various levels. Communication by leaders, managers and within teams including the extended family helps in bring the cohesion of employees in a virtual hybrid model. The strategies also need to cover all types of employees (regular, remote, gig, gender, those with caregiving responsibilities, age). Leveraging digital and social mediums for communication brings in the necessary impact.

Leadership

Peter Drucker said "Management is doing things right. Leadership is doing the right things". He points out that in the midst of maximizing operational performance, revenues and bringing down expenses, leadership is about setting organizational priorities and ensuring a conducive environment for the vision of the organization to be accomplished. The agile approach and practices can help leaders drive the change in the disruptive business landscape and get the market advantage. Some of the Agile Leadership traits for the micro change management approach are as follows:

- Creating a learning organization
- Intent based and empathetic leadership
- Creating a self-service mindset
- Build necessary environments and infrastructure

An agile leader is also able to visualize the "Microscope and Telescope" – i.e.. have teams work on the current items and focus on long term ones. They ensure that there is a change in mindset towards self-service and outcome based monitoring rather than effort based monitoring. Daniel Goleman in his book[7] talks about the importance of emotions over IQ leading to empathetic leadership. According to his theory, the first pillar of emotional intelligence is the focus of leaders to direct their own attention. The next step is to focus on others leading to the second pillar i.e. empathy and the third building social relationships. Empathetic

leadership is mandatory when teams are dispersed extremely relevant to bring inclusivity and diversity of its employees.

Table 2 shows the types of empathy and how it helps in the new normal.

Empathy	Description	How does it help?
Cognitive empathy	the ability to understand another person's perspective	Get best efforts from teams
Emotional empathy	the ability to feel what someone else feels	Effective mentoring
Empathetic concern	the ability to sense what another person needs from you	Build social relationships

Leadership should also ensure appropriate investment in infrastructure and tools to ensure that work from anywhere possible. This includes having facilities on mobile phones to access work elements, have mechanisms to ensure remote onboarding of new recruits etc.

Agile leadership ensures that organizations are able to respond to the increased complexity better. It also ensures a relevant and impactful communication to teams with vision, clarity and understanding of the emotional quotient of their employees.

Reskilling

As illustrated in fig.2, the work force would be a combination of multi-generation and culture. There is also an emergence of gig economy with multi-skilling as a key factor. As mentioned earlier, there would be newer roles as well.

Infosys has embarked on a journey to become a completely knowledge and data driven live organization with the agility of a startup to quickly sense the changing business needs and respond effectively to a rapidly changing external environment. We believe in a committed investment to continuously train and cross skill employees for the ever changing technological and industry landscape.

The reskilling content for the newer roles must-

- include content to change the mindset
- be based on a self-service, self-paced mode

This is specifically when employees choose the remote mode of working. Empathetic leadership follows a triad as shown below-

- provide an integrated and personalized learning experience

The training programs for upskilling must incorporate content to bridge the gap(ex. bridge program for moving to newer roles with delta skilling) and personalized to suit the learner's pace and time. The onus of learning should be placed on learners thereby promoting a pull based learning rather a push based one. The learning platforms must be available, flexible and must provide direction to the learner to upskill and reskill.

There would be the emergence of flexi roles. For example, a project manager is a designation, however the manager may be performing the role of a scrum master or a coach and the like. Hence learning paths must cater to such flexi roles and allow them to reskill themselves on demand. The learning management system should provide required recommendations and creation of learning paths in a personalized manner to help achieve this.

Since employees would now be working on flexi roles, flexi timings and flexi time zones, upskilling using digital platforms which meet these learning needs is required. Such platforms use applied AI to predict and recommend courses for their needs. Such content also need to be innovative and suited for self-paced learning. Digital platforms like Lex and Wingspan have been built to incorporate the mentioned features.

Building resilience

Policy reforms become crucial with the challenges that come with the hybrid virtual model and the factors to be considered. This comes in the wake of the googlies thrown by the global flux due to the COVID, changing work cultures and the disruption. Resilience will be built through inclusivity and diversity, effective monitoring(outcome based as opposed to effort based) strategies and focus on team. The policies thus framed ensure an inclusive working culture and helps build resilient organizations.

The change management when done in a micro step manner will help organizations survive and thrive the volatile and uncertain business conditions as envisaged by the VUCA model.

> "Trust in the leadership within teams and between individuals is so essential to accelerate the agility and efficiency of teams – especially when the connections are mostly virtual. Building that trust over an Internet connection especially among new team members will take strong and sensitive leadership"
>
> **Ravi Kumar,**
> *President ,Infosys*

The VUCA model

VUCA model (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, Ambiguity) was used in 1987 derived from the leadership theories of theories of Warren Bennis and Burt Nanus[8]. With the new normal and the hybrid virtual working model coming in, this has been changed to Vision, Understanding, Clarity and Agility as shown in fig. 6.
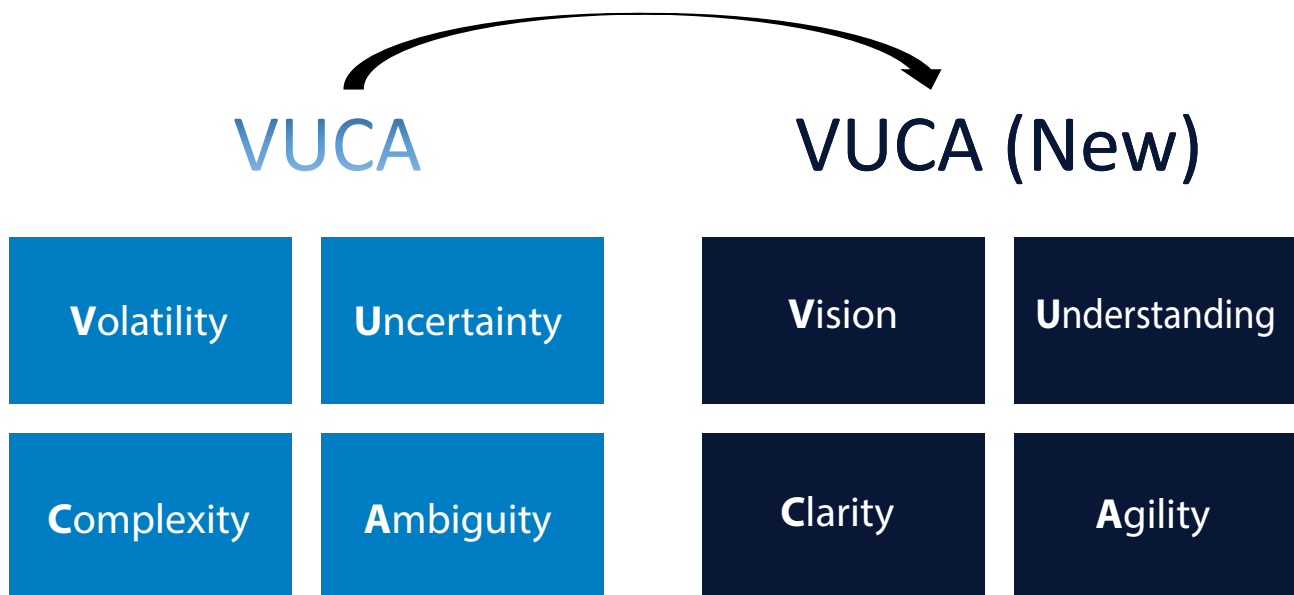

Fig 6. VUCA model

The concerns have been heightened by varied customers, diverse employee profiles, pressure on budgets, sustainable innovation and pace of digital transformation. This new VUCA model wrapped with Agile practices will help in transitioning to the new normal.

Vision – The end state picture that is intended constitutes vision. While the process of execution might change, the overall vision and end state goals should not be changed.

Understanding- Quick adaptation by leaders to changes and how to manage them

Clarity – Communication of situation with clarity and with openness. Law of connection from the 21 irrefutable laws for leadership can help here[9] .

Agility – Leadership would be flexible to changes and follow the practices of agility

There are several growth opportunities post the pandemic. The leadership can leverage several of the practices mentioned, tailor it to their needs and arrive at the right model to execute the strategies to move to the new normal.
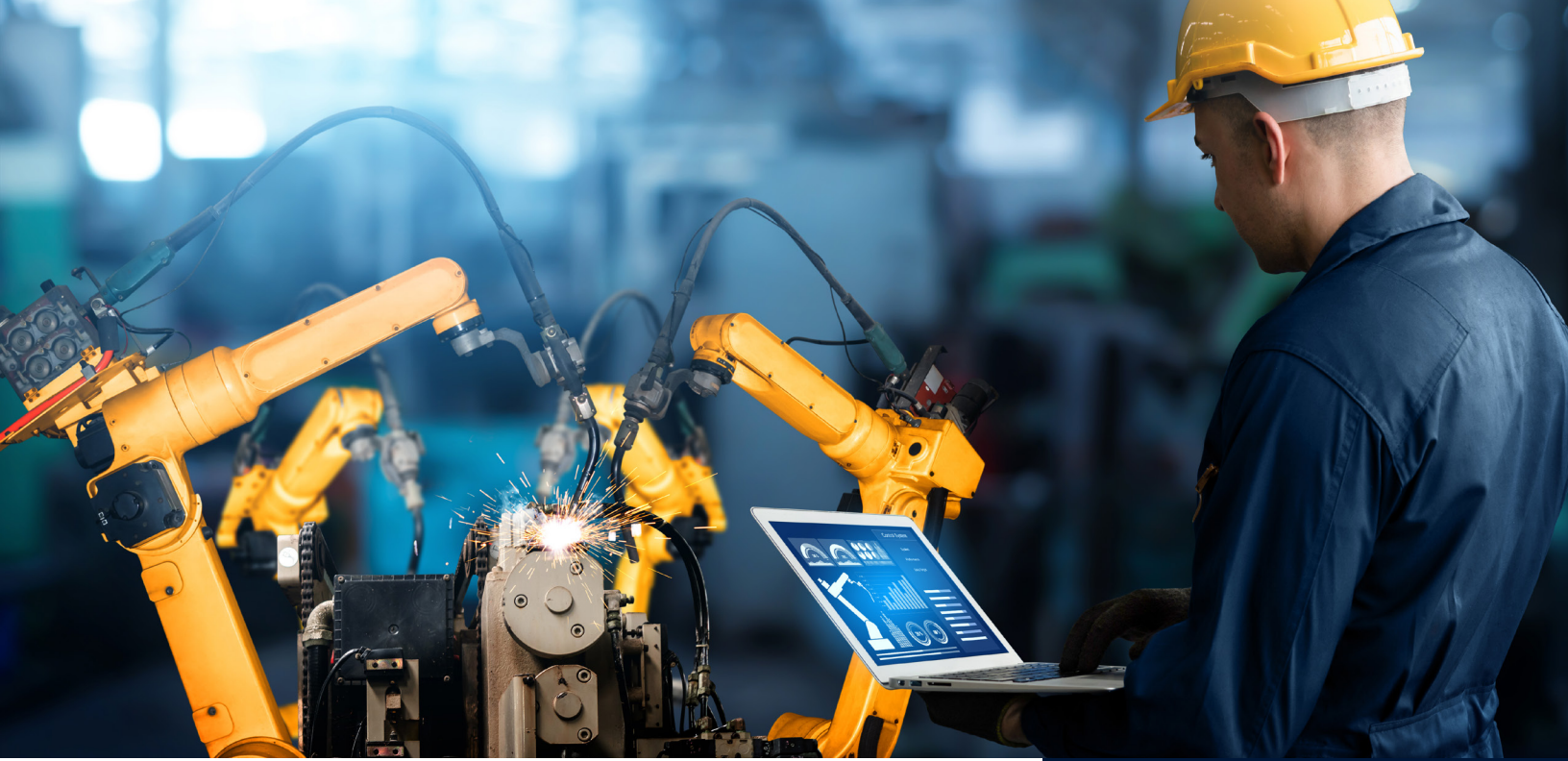
Closing comments

It pays to be Agile when the ground is breaking and statistics prove the same for Infosys too. Converse to the myth that agile practices are difficult to be implemented in a dispersed team model, the practices of cadence, prioritization, self-organization etc. bring the much needed traits in a work from anywhere model. In addition to these practices, it becomes imperative to sustain the affinity and cohesion of teams with the help of integrated platform that ensure a sense of belonging and remove unwanted fatigue of switching to multiple tools. The movement to such new working model also calls for a Microchange™ management approach in an agile manner with a robust and empathetic leadership driving the change. This, we believe will help teams and organizations recover and thrive the pandemic and enable work from anywhere with rigor and enhance productivity of its teams the agile way.

> "It is really your attitude, your sense of the future which will give you the confidence to continue what you will"
>
> **Nandan Nilekani,**
> *Co-founder and Chairman of the Board, Infosys*

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About the authors

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Vice President, Head – Education, Training & Assessments

In his tenure at Infosys, which spans 22+ years, Thiru has managed many vital client relationships for the Financial Services Europe based accounts before taking on the current role of Head of Education, Training and Assessment (ETA). ETA department is one of the key business enabling departments at Infosys. Thirumala Arohi (known as Thiru) in his role of Head of ETA, drives various learning interventions aggressively to enable the employees to be future ready. In this journey of creating next-gen learning experiences, ETA has progressed well in establishing and enhancing Digital Learning platforms that enables "Anytime, Anywhere and on Any Device" learning combining with adoption of AI/ML techniques to engage and enrich learners' experiences. Several partnering agreements are in place with Universities and MOOCs, etc. in leveraging their programs. Along with driving content digitally, the Learning and Development arm of ETA also focuses on developing holistic skills in the areas of business, behavioral and leadership such as Design Thinking.

Meenakshi S
Lead principal – Education, Training & Assessments

Meenakshi is an accomplished Agile/DevOps practitioner, trainer and coach with over two decades of experience in software development and education services. Meenakshi leads multiple portfolios as Infosys Limited. As the Head of the Agile and DevOps Enablement, she is tasked with the responsibility of creating competencies amongst the Infosys talent pool in this area. She also leads the competency development of Infosys fresh hires in IT foundation skills, a role that crafts astute software professionals of the future. Her experience and contributions landed her with the responsibility to anchor the social outreach program for educational institutions in India. A typical day in the life of Meenakshi spans from designing and executing large scale enablement programs across geographies, coaching teams to implement Agile/DevOps practices, crafting curated training models & courses, delivering training sessions to global audience including leaders and freshers and penning away her next thought leadership point of view!

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