



# Driving process excellence for VUCA businesses



**B**usinesses are evolving with time and in all dimensions owing to the need to be disruptive and innovative. For a business process services (BPS) provider, it has become increasingly challenging to have a value-based approach toward process excellence and delivery. Finding prospects for avenues for process improvement needs a more innovative and customized approach. This generation of change in business process can be explained using adjectives - volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA). New-age technology fueled by machine learning, artificial intelligence and augmented reality comes first in VUCA processes as they are constantly innovating their products and services to delight the end customer. Service providers supporting such businesses have to ensure agility and transparency in their delivery to avoid getting derailed from their customer expectations. Business challenges in the VUCA era are understood better through Mario Benedetti's statement: "When we thought we had all the answers, suddenly, all the questions changed."

To ensure successful and spotless execution of projects for such processes, 3 key trends are important owing to the complexity of the VUCA process –



**Outcome focus**



**Agile and responsive**

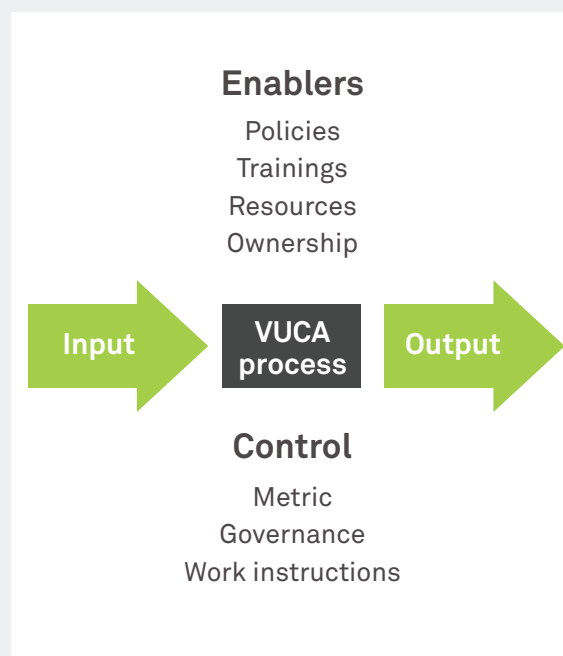


**Strategic alignment**

## Process excellence for VUCA business

For VUCA processes, customers expect projects with shorter timelines and with high impact to ensure they are aligned with the changing business dynamics and stay relevant. Frequent priority changes challenge the feasibility of initiating six sigma projects in such a scenario, making way for smaller improvement initiatives. Thus it is important for process excellence to be pragmatic and target business outcomes through new techniques customized for business requirements. According to Klaus Bertelsen, "It's really about prioritizing the project portfolio and bringing forward the ones with the biggest impact and completing them sooner rather than having a bunch of projects open that go on and on forever."

To understand the process excellence realm of influence, we can use IPO(CE) (input-process-output- control-enabler) diagram highlighting the scope for VUCA processes:





This approach can be explained through the example of a leading self-driving vehicle technology provider for whom Wipro is a partner in services related to operations and quality control activities. The customer has a mission to make it safe and easy for people and things to get where they're going using self-driving technology. For Wipro, it is one of the most prestigious and strategically important accounts to be aligned with, and has constant focus on customer delight.

Let us understand the scope of process excellence for VUCA processes. Input for the process is defined by the available technology and objective of the process.

**INPUT** - Improvement opportunities in the input has to be highlighted by the service provider but has dependency on the customer to get it implemented. On ground team is responsible for suggesting changes based on the Gemba (where value is added to the product or service) observations and their understanding of business. Customer should be open and encouraging for such suggestions as they come directly from the users of their tools.

**PROCESS** - Scope of improvement can be realized through lean and process automation opportunities which flare up through value stream mapping and key stroke mapping. Any proposal on the workflow change, non-value activities, latency in process, process wastes is the responsibility of the service providers. It is important to calibrate the process flow with the business requirement. For one of the most critical and time-bound processes, the team was missing SLA adherence to TAT as it was following a FIFO approach. Some tasks are ambiguous and agents waited for clarification which had a cascading effect on TAT of other tasks.

Changing to LIFO approach was a game changer for Wipro as the SLA adherence improved from 70% to >98% by eradicating the effect of ambiguous tasks on others. Thus, it is important to judge the requirement of the process and plan the process flow accordingly.

**OUTPUT** - Feedback on the output should be gathered from the customers to understand the relevance of services provided. On the other hand, costumers should engage strategically with the service provider to get operational insights. This output feedback provides a reference to measure the actual quality of the VUCA processes. Take the example of the driverless vehicle technology company for which Wipro provides operational services. The only way to measure the quality of work done by Wipro is through the way the vehicle reacts to various scenarios.

**CONTROL** - Process excellence team should device control plans and checklists to assure that any process improvements are maintained over the life cycle. Keeping a check on the agreed success metrics to detect any deviation is important for any process. Real-time dashboards help in surfacing any variations in the performance. The only way the customers can feel that the process is in control is through various real-time performance related dashboards.

**ENABLERS** - For a VUCA process, process enablers like policies, tools and resources are very critical for success. Any error in the enablers can lead to rework or complete failure. For the service provider, it is important to be vigilant and inquisitive with the process enablers to stay relevant. There should be a mechanism and process for suggesting changes in policies based on the new scenarios and it should be inclusive at all levels.

## Key implementations for business process improvement

In this section, we look at a few initiatives taken by the Wipro team in managing and improving the process for VUCA business for its customer. Quality tools like Lean and Six Sigma can be implemented only after exploring and studying the VUCA processes and business situation. Phrasing the problem statement is the key to it and it is important to be open toward truly understanding the problem rather than going straight toward the solution. Volatility and uncertainty of such processes bring a lot of stress and risk in the work culture. This stress brings “unconscious bias” toward an earlier experience of a similar situation challenging the efficacy of improvement projects. There is a requirement to think afresh for a tailor-made solution even for basic problems. Automation opportunities must be explored for every Lean project identified to ensure that the solution provided stays relevant with time.

When the process is uncertain, its complexity often gets overanalyzed, which makes any improvement project look farfetched. It is important to have the basics in place for such processes and then have six sigma and lean projects implemented over them. Below are some of the rudimentary elements of process excellence for VUCA processes -

### Establishing right measurement system

It is important for any business to have a parameter to measure the present situation and plan their improvement journey ahead. Customers expect customized assistance in terms of establishing performance parameters along with the analytical tools to understand the usage, patterns, process limitations and improvement areas.

VUCA processes are very dynamic as the scope of the business and the work instructions often have ambiguity, subjective policies and new scenarios. Establishing productivity and quality targets may not be possible due to the complexity of the process.

**Wipro Solution** - For the self-driving vehicle technology provider, data on productivity and quality were collected for the stabilization and ramp-up period. As the nature of the business was dynamic, relative quality and productivity metrics were defined through sanitized and logically selected historical data. After considering the variations in the influencing factors, daily work units for agents were defined. This took care of the complexity and other variations within different tasks and provided a common scale to measure the performance. These quality efficiency and productivity efficiency baselines served as a medium to measure performance and drive business with mutually agreed incremental targets.

### Smart operations

Traction of the performance is equally important as setting benchmarks. Provisions should be made to have a clear and real-time reflection of the actual performance of the operators. This will warrant delivery and quality as planned and structured and prevent any situation of bedlam. In the absence of performance reporting and visualization of the data generated, the process can go off track and deviate from its objective. Customers want to have visibility on all facets of business, and not just metrics.

**Wipro Solution** - For the self-driving vehicle technology provider, Wipro provided various dashboards which can reflect the daily performance of the team and highlight the key challenges. Along with that, dashboards reflecting financial figures, error trends and other process-specific KPIs were provided. Auto-generated emails showing daily performance were also implemented to keep all relevant stakeholders informed. Wipro was able to provide this using the infrastructure of the clients and eradicating any challenges of data leakage. These dashboards provided a platform to judge the performance of the operators and incentivize them accordingly.

### Work breakdown

Since new business processes are complex and challenging to get trained into, a work breakdown approach is followed. The whole set of work needs to be broken into a few buckets based on similarity in work instructions. But as the process is dynamic, having sufficient work in each bucket is difficult. This leads to an increase in wait time for new task creation and underutilization of the operators deployed.

**Wipro solution** - To tend to this issue of operator wait time due to unavailability of tasks, a training academy was implemented. This had two aspects to it

- i) To cross-train operators in different buckets
- ii) To provide a progression path to become a process SME to build a map of an area, all the tasks generated for linear, polygonal and signals need to be completed.

The team was facing a challenge of uneven load as there were different volumes of tasks in the 3 buckets. Thus, some agents would be overburdened and some had no volume to work on. Cross-training high performers and turning them into Flexperts helped in resolving such challenges.

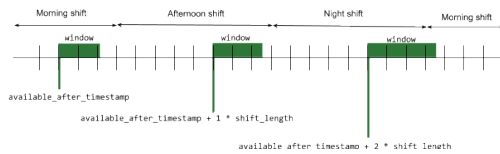
Overburdening someone beyond their capability was also tracked for effectiveness through close monitoring of the Flexperts in the initial days, and if required, additional mentor support was provided.

### Skill assessment

To check the alignment of the operators with the revised policies and work instructions, there is a requirement to create periodic quiz tasks and map all the operators on the same grounds on their awareness. Quiz tasks have deadlines and are supposed to be completed by the operators within the project deadline. The efficacy of this plan can be challenged as the quiz used to be rolled out for everyone at the same time, and the operators used to pay extra attention to them. Thus, quizzes were no longer a reflection of the scenario on the floor. To resolve this issue, provisions should be made to make the quizzes randomized for the operators.

**Wipro Solution** - When a quiz task is created, a random timestamp between is selected and stored as the quiz's available\_after\_timestamp in the quiz creation tool. Once the timestamp passes the quiz would be injected as the next task in a worker's queue. The intent is to randomly distribute the quizzes over time to avoid all the operators getting the same task at the same time, thus revealing the task as a quiz and not a normal, production task. Tool has been scripted to determine the quiz's availability by assigning a unique availability window for each operator. The tool will allocate a quiz task to the agents on any day of the week.

### Quiz availability window determination



$$Window(t) = \frac{DeadlineFactor}{t_{deadline} - t} + MinWindow$$

### Quiz creation & roll out

- Trainer create quiz tasks based on complex policies and scenarios. These tasks are similar to production tasks
- Quiz tasks are assigned to operators
- Quiz tasks are inserted in the production pipeline by the tool



### Quiz Identity Concealed

### Availability window assignment

After quiz availability window is determined, the tool assigns a unique availability window for each operator. Operators can work on quiz tasks only during the assigned window

$$\begin{aligned} Window(t_{deadline} - ShiftLength) &= ShiftLength \\ \Rightarrow \frac{DeadlineFactor}{t_{deadline} - (t_{deadline} - ShiftLength)} + MinWindow &= ShiftLength \\ \Rightarrow \frac{DeadlineFactor}{ShiftLength} + MinWindow &= ShiftLength \\ \Rightarrow DeadlineFactor &= ShiftLength * (ShiftLength - MinWindow) \end{aligned}$$

## Automated quality check

Today's customer wants zero tolerance in quality as any error can be critical for the business. Take the example of a driverless car technology company. One accident due to gaps in the product can challenge the existence of the business and dent the consumer's confidence in the technology. Thus, it is important to maintain high product quality to keep the industry alive and relevant. But quality comes with a cost and technology should be used to reduce expenses without compromising on the quality.

**Wipro solution** – Automated checks have been implemented that help ensure coherence with the outlined specs. When the tasks have been completed, there are validator checks implemented in the tool, which have to be answered before submitting.

If the operator does not attend to the validator questions, a pop up will appear as a reminder. Similarly, when the QCer is making an error and writing a reason, a popup will appear if the statement does not contain all the required attributes to zero in on the exact reason for marking the error.

Provisions have also been made to suppress false positive marking of errors. The process excellence team has regular contact with customers to propose amendments required in the auto validators.

## Quality control

Contact centers for the VUCA processes are now shifting their key focus from productivity to quality. The BPS providers are under increasing pressure to provide maximum surveillance to service quality. Customers expect service providers to raise an alarm about any risks in the quality of the process spontaneously and take ownership. Any lapse in highlighting issues on time can be critical to the timelines of projects. Often, the agents confront judgement- and perception-based situations. Measures should be taken toward increasing the reproducibility and repeatability of resolutions in such cases.

**Wipro solution** - To have a dedicated team of experts who along with process excellence analyze error trends and investigate cognizant patterns. It is important to identify the root cause of the errors through 5Y analysis.

The Quality team attends to all work instructions and updates reviews to ensure that there is synchronicity in all the meetings and all the possible ambiguity regarding policies are resolved. They act as the process auditor with the primary responsibility of reducing ambiguity in the system.

## About the authors

### Saurabh Singh

Assistant Manager  
Digital Operations & Platforms, Wipro

Saurabh Singh has about 4 years of experience in process excellence, six sigma and lean. He has worked with leading media and technology companies and has helped them improve their processes. He is a Lean Six Sigma Black Belt certified professional and an IIM alumni.

Customers have realized their worth and trust their verdict for any exclusive scenarios in the process.

## Conclusion

The economic, social and technological environments of this era of business are identified by their Volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous nature. Collaborating directly with customers and aligning to their objectives has become a key differentiator.

Business agility involving responsiveness and prompt action is a must for BPS providers to win the trust of the customer. The age of certainty and stable habitat is moving into uncertainty, disruptions and pandemonium.

Service providers need to embrace a customized framework involving all the stakeholders in the supply chain and addressing each stake factor. VUCA processes require additional initiatives of strategic thinking and pioneering change in the process. VUCA does not mean that it is completely unpredictable but requires clarity and agility in vision and process understanding. In all, service providers should focus on high-performing delivery and constantly explore automation opportunities to cut down on operating cost.

### Devendra K. Lulla

Senior manager  
Digital Operations & Platforms, Wipro

Devendra K. Lulla has about 16 years of service delivery experience in managing and leading the media, E-Commerce, telecom and technology outsourced business. Presently he leads one of the most prestigious businesses of Wipro's Digital Operations & Platforms service line.

**Wipro Limited**

Doddakannelli, Sarjapur Road,  
Bangalore-560 035,  
India

Tel: +91 (80) 2844 0011

Fax: +91 (80) 2844 0256

**wipro.com**



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For more information,  
please write to us at  
**info@wipro.com**

