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Think Velocity
Get Change *Right*

Demystifying Velocity

Edited transcript

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Ajay S. Bhutoria, former MD and CEO, Zensar Technologies talks about the impact of enterprise velocity, how to embrace business-first agility, and the new frontiers of digital transformation.

Architect the three basic components of enterprise velocity

Describe in your own words, what enterprise velocity is and why it is critical in today's world?

AB: For me, velocity has three components.

1. One—something we are all intimately familiar with—speed and agility. In the overallvelocity platform, this (speed and agility) is the dominant criteria and it is of paramount importance

2. Second is thoughtful, cohesive, strong product and experience design. This emphasizes the importance of design and product management in the overall cycle of how we deliver products, customer experience and engagement

3. The third criteria addresses how the product journeys through time. The first version of a product is never the last version. Rather the first version leads to the second version, and the third version, right? And that process of constant enrichment, evolution and calibration is the third attribute of the velocity platform, and this is driven by a data driven feedback mechanism

In a nutshell, the velocity platform is speed and agility (which is the dominant criteria), and two other sufficient criteria—product design and product management, and the third one is the ability to adapt and maneuver the product - evolve it, enrich it, calibrate it over a period of time, based on data. So data is the third part of our velocity platform.

Use design thinking for better-informed product management decisions

Why do companies struggle implementing design thinking in product development?

AB: Let me underline couple of key criteria that digital natives and startups have already embraced and increasingly, we see others implement.

1. Typically when you say, "Hey, we've got to look at a project and deliver it through scrum as a methodology, run sprints, and deliver the product after x number of sprints," people tend to categorize it as a technology or as a CIO problem. But speed and agility are not just technology problems or CIO problems. We now see a lot of mature organizations take a wider, more enlarged view of what agility is. Agility actually starts with business and continues through technology, process and ends with delivery of the technical product. So, business-first agility is critical. A decade back, when agile as a process was first taking roots, I'd often say, simply put, there are four stages of evolution that an entity can go through in order to embrace agile. First was test-driven development, i.e., test cases were written before you could develop them. Second was scrum as the popular method of delivering agile processes into technology projects. Then criticism emerged around scrum because it did not deliver high resolution so the common rigors of project management that one would see in the waterfall method got compromised. In the third stage, scrum evolved to include high-resolution project management overlay to ensure that scrumbasedprojects were more definite, predictable, with a clear outcome. Stage four wasbusiness-first agile. Where we are right now is that agile as a process needs to run through the organization. And we witness business-first agile in quite a few of our client partners. They have agile work pods in their business teams and it continues through technology, process and delivery.

2. The second key part of the double-click is that product management is also not just a business problem. Product management, as a discipline, needs to run through the process - business continuing into technology. So, technology needs to take adequate ownership of product management. Often times it is the coming together of business and technology as a part of the agile process because every scrum team has a product manager, etc. but the appreciation of the product needs to run from the front to the back. So, on the one hand, there is agile as a technology process that connects to business and on the other, product design as a discipline, links all the way to technology delivery.

Drive business-first agility through executive sponsorship

How can organizations adopt a business-first agile culture rapidly?

AB: Let me answer that in two parts

1. First of all, the components of this platform that I explained - agility, strong product management and, evolution and enrichment of the product driven in a scientific manner through data-driven feedback needs to be understood at all levels of the organization. It can't be driven in one part of the organization alone; everyone needs to have a holistic picture. It is often misunderstood that as long as you know what you need to do, it's okay. A highly specialized assembly line driven format is not effective when it comes to designing and building new products, it might be useful in industrially fabricating new products but all levels of the company must appreciate, understand and implement the granular details of the platform when it comes to constructing new products.

2. For this scenario to become tangible and deliver results, you cannot underestimate the importance of a top-down approach. There has to be an executive sponsor, and the executive sponsor drives it with energy, focus, and intent and the company embraces it.

3. Finally, the faster we appreciate the importance of the ambidextrous nature of developing products of the future, the easier it becomes to train and coach people, and develop a certain mindset.
These three aspects evolve into a culture.

How Zensar is using velocity to steer digital transformation

How does Zensar unlock and accelerate digital transformation?

AB: We are talking in terms of what is needed to drive digital transformation in a company. Typically, digital transformation is a confluence of four topics—design, engineering, data, and velocity (speed and agility). I see these four components as the building blocks of digital. Hence, if I were to look at digital via the lens of these sub-units, in effect, it comes down to experience and product design, engineering, data including analytics, AI/ML - core applications supported by a highly agile and effective infrastructure. These comprise our five strategic progress areas.

- Experience and product design
- Advanced engineering services
- Data engineering, analytics and AIML
- Application services
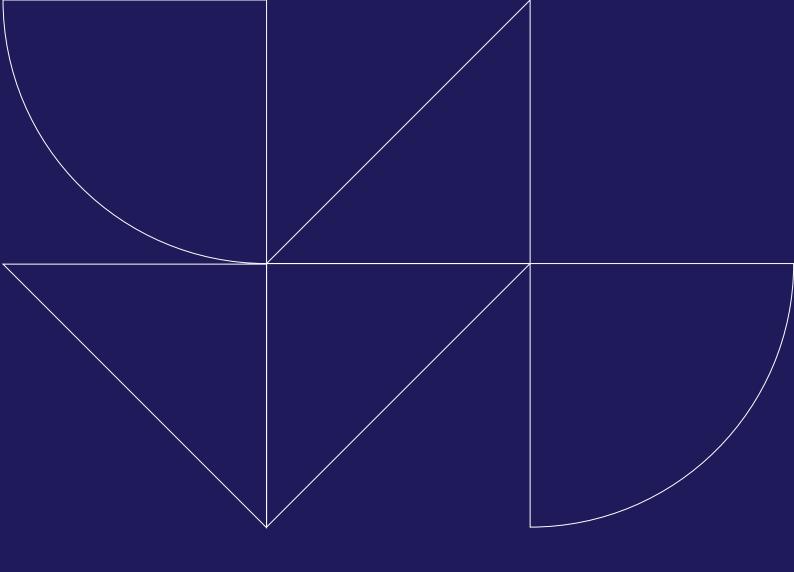- Infrastructure services or Foundation services

This is the core of our strategy, instantiated through two to five playbooks per focus area, resulting in twenty-one playbooks for the company, of which a certain number are our priority playbooks. And then, we have a big focus on execution through playbook instantiation and supported by what we call, four colors of execution - all of this to drive the agility continuum on the one side, which includes agile as a process, DevOps as an enabler and cloud as an accelerator of agile, plus strong product management and strong data-driven feedback mechanism to propel the velocity platform.

Zensar's services provide a connected continuum, transforming experiences

Why should clients choose Zensar as a partner?

AB: So, if I as an organization were to look for a partner, the first few criteria I would look for are capabilities to build new products i.e. product and experience, research, strategy, and design. Then continuing on - launching the product, managing the product brand and doing the creatives around the product. These competencies are a strong muscle that we have built over the last five years. We have Foolproof delivering in the UK; Indigo Slate delivering in the US, now operating under the overall umbrella of Zensar Studios. But no product design is over unless you deliver an MVP at the end. So the engineering firepower needed is provided by our advanced engineering services. Increasingly, this firepower is driven and delivered on a cloud-native platform, which is also a part of the advanced engineering services practice. And none of this, as it stands, can be delivered without a strong capability around data engineering and driving use cases around machine learning, analytics, and AI. The continuum that we provide—from product, research, strategy, design all the way to engineering, then managing insights—is a strong suit, which I feel the clients are finding increasingly useful.

The beauty of it is in the way we have structured our expertise. For example, if you are in advanced stages in any one of these cycles, let's say, you have already placed a significant amount of effort in product design and now you need help with engineering, we can easily plug-in an engineering service line or a data engineering service line and align with the stage of evolution that your product is in. It's not necessary to involve Zensar exclusively for engineering, data, experience or product design. Our practices are in continuum yet they are discrete enough to provide a specific service. I think the flexibility that we provide to our clients to pick and choose a service is what makes people choose Zensar. Also, even when we might be engaged in engineering and perhaps the product and design experience is being executed by a different entity, we are able to integrate properly because of our suit of expertise. I'd say, we make it seamless.

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We conceptualize, build, and manage digital products through experience design, data engineering, and advanced analytics for over 200 leading companies. Our solutions leverage industry-leading platforms to help our clients be competitive, agile, and disruptive while moving with velocity through change and opportunity.

With headquarters in Pune, India, our 10,000+ associates work across 33 locations, including San Jose, Seattle, Princeton, Cape Town, London, Singapore, and Mexico City.

For more information please contact: marketing@zensar.com | www.zensar.com