

# LEADING IN CHALLENGING TIMES

A guide for leading through  
adversity and disruption

by Mark Stuart, CSP





# LEADERSHIP IN A DIGITAL AGE – HOW CAN LEADERS NAVIGATE THE POST-PANDEMIC WORLD? BY MARK STUART, CSP



The Covid-19 pandemic has increased the demands on leaders. Ever since the pandemic, they've had to rapidly decide how to operate with their staff working from home, how to start reintroducing them back into the workplace, how to keep selling and maintaining customer relationships, and what technology to adopt to allow their firms to leverage the new virtual world.

From my work with over hundreds of clients, I've developed a 4-stage framework I refer to as the acronym LIDA which represents Leadership in a Digital Age, which is usually delivered as a keynote, workshop, or a webinar.

I then further define these letters as the skills I see as critical for a future-ready leader:

- ◆ Learning
- ◆ Innovation
- ◆ Data
- ◆ Agility

## • LEARNING

Leaders can never stop learning. With the advancement of technology infiltrating all aspects of the workplace, leaders need to stay current with recent trends and the technology options at their disposal. At a minimum they need to understand all the new acronyms/terms such as AI, ML, RPA, OCR, NLG, Big Data, Cloud, NN etc. They don't need to know the details, but they do need to understand the potential impact on their business to be able to make key strategic decisions. Those who fail to do this risk getting left risk behind and see their businesses suffer.

They also need to plan the learning of their teams. We know that many jobs are being severely impacted by technology, such as call centre staff. As a leader you need to plan 1 to 3 years ahead for the up- and re-skilling of your impacted employees.

This learning takes time, so some forward planning is required. What are the skills that you as a leader need to develop to be able to guide the future direction of you teams, and what are the new skills and roles that will be created across your firm and how do you redeploy as many of your affected staff as possible?

Learning is still a valid skill and part of the LIDA framework. In the past couple of months, leaders have had to learn how to adapt to working from home, how to best leverage the technology available, how to better manage remote teams, and how to plan for the future of work post-crisis.

As a leader you need to be continually open to learning new skills, and be aware of when you have knowledge gaps to be filled.

## • INNOVATE



The need to be innovative is nothing new in the Digital Age, in fact it's a core competency, however many leaders are still not focussed on it. Some will leave it to 'someone else' or the IT/ innovation team, however this is a very closed mindset. As a leader you should be focused on how to create additional value through innovation, otherwise your competitors will grab market share.

This doesn't mean the leader needs to generate innovative ideas themselves, but they need to either set up a structure and culture that encourages innovation and empower others to take action. Innovation can come from within your own teams, or if you have an innovation team, by working with them on what challenges your team or clients are facing. Your team are best placed to identify client needs but might need guidance on what to do with that information.

Innovation is still a key skill during the Covid-19 period. Now more than ever, leaders need to find new ways of working and generating business. This could mean a change in sales strategy, creating a new product for the current environment or planning a new organisational structure post-crisis.

I've heard from some leaders that they're scaling back innovation in these times, but personally I think it's the time to ramp it up if feasible, whilst others are focussed on different priorities. Obviously, this doesn't include those who have had to furlough staff or are fighting for survival, but if your teams have some excess capacity whilst volume has dipped, then it can be put to good use in generating innovative ideas for additional value. This can give you a head start as the economy emerges from the crisis.

## • DATA

This is where there is a potential change to the original framework. Data is one of the crucial aspects of AI and technological developments. Understanding its potential and the value it could add to your firm is one of your responsibilities as a leader. Every firm produces a certain amount of data, but few are aware of just how much, and fewer know what to do with it.

Data can help you drive predictive analytics; your customers buying patterns, needs and want, optimal shipping routes, buying levels or future market moves. Therefore, having a data strategy is crucial. To fully maximise its potential requires substantial investment, so you need to decide whether to put money into a data science team and see what they can produce, or decide upfront what you want to achieve and then allocate for that.

The potential change to the framework in these times, is to replace Data with Decision-Making. The pandemic has proven that fast, decisive decision-making has been vital in helping some countries navigate the pandemic better than others. Likewise, in the corporate environment, leaders need to make quicker decisions to help drive innovation and change within their organisations. Yes, you still might need to conduct research and testing, but don't procrastinate and overanalyse to the point of paralysis.

## • AGILITY

With the speed of technological innovation, being able to move and implement with agility has never been more important. There is not much point having a great idea and then taking 2 years to implement it because of outdated internal policies, as by then, one of your competitors will have probably beaten you to it.

Software development teams have been using agile methodology for many years now, and the concepts and philosophies have spilt over into leadership development. Leaders need to move with speed, and make decisions based on feedback and diverse inputs. Using technology can help with this, but fundamentally you'll need to address outdated processes and fixed mindsets to change the culture of your organisation.

This framework lays out the core competencies of the modern leader. I don't expect most leaders to be proficient in all of them, but I hope it helps highlight where further development could be of benefit, or the complementary skills you need across your management team to be able to prepare your firm for the future of work.

*Mark Stuart, CSP is a sought-after motivational speaker based in Singapore who speaks virtually or in-person on Leadership In A Pandemic Age, The Future of Work, How to Build A Culture of Innovation, Thriving in the New Normal and more. Mark serves over 350+ clients in 19 countries.*

*The above article is an adapted version and comprises of Mark's 'Leadership In A Digital Age' keynote speech and workshop, available virtually or in-person.*

*To learn more about Mark, or Leadership In A Digital Age,  
visit **[www.global-innovation-speaker.com](http://www.global-innovation-speaker.com)***

*or*

*contact Mark at **[mark@anagram-group.com](mailto:mark@anagram-group.com)***

# 4 TIPS FOR MANAGING VIRTUAL TEAMS DURING A PANDEMIC

## BY MARK STUART, CSP



The pandemic has challenged leaders more than ever before. Since the start of the pandemic, in-person events have been cancelled, employees have been forced to sporadically work from home, and businesses have struggled to adapt to virtual events. Whilst some companies have always been remote, that's not the case for the majority so the adjustment has been greater.



Leaders have struggled for how to allocate resources, monitor work, coordinate large scale virtual events remotely, hold people accountable, keep employees motivated and engaged, monitor employee wellness, make client sales, and drive innovation.

All this from the comfort of people's homes – but not all homes are set up with the luxury of a separate office and high-speed fibre Wi-Fi.

So, what can leaders do to effectively manage remote teams?

## #1: FOCUS ON EMPLOYEE WELLNESS

One of the positive aspects that has come out of the pandemic is the focus on employee wellness. There have been many reports of employees feeling stress, anxious overwhelmed and disengaged from their colleagues. Leaders need to stay in regular video contact with their teams and ensure they are set up for home working. If the budget allows, can you give your employees a stipend to buy a better desk, chair, camera and mic? These are basic equipment to allow them to work more effectively and ergonomically from home. Giving them access to counselling, training, or a mentor could also prove beneficial to their longer term mental health.

## #2: USE THE RIGHT VIRTUAL TOOLS TO COLLABORATE AND COMMUNICATE

The days of being able to lean over and chat to a colleague in your office is temporarily over, but that doesn't mean you can't collaborate easily with your team. Yes, Zoom/Webex/TEAMS fatigue is a real thing, but the use of video will enhance your interactions with your employees. If you can, try not to cross over personal messaging apps as work messaging tools and use something that can easily track conversations and attachments, like Slack or TEAMS. For projects, you can utilise cloud-based software such as Trello or Asana to monitor progress, work assignments and capacity without the need for micro-management.



### #3: OFFER FLEXIBILITY TO MEET EMPLOYEE NEEDS

There is no question that employee needs have been permanently changed by the pandemic, and the expectation of many is that remote working/flexibility will be part of contracts going forward. In recent months, leading companies in Singapore have put their stake in the ground regarding new working models, ones driven by employees' desires.

DBS was one of the early movers allowing staff to work remotely up to 40% of the time. UOB soon followed with a similar 40% model for the majority of its workforce. Therefore, as leaders you'll need to decide what works for you without suffering a drain of talent. Employees are starting to vote with their feet so you need to create a working model that builds in flexible working options, but also ensures the success of your organisation. Not everyone can work from home, but try to offer flexibility wherever you can.



## #4: GO BACK TO BASICS OF MANAGEMENT WHEN REMOTE WORKING

Keeping employees motivated and engaged has always been a challenge for any leader, and prolonged periods of working from home are not making this any easier. Team-bonding sessions, lunches and a simple “thank you” aren’t as easy when you’re all not in the office at the same time, so we need to find different methods. However, we don’t need to reinvent the wheel here. If anything, we need to back to basics.

We know from research from authors such as Dan Pink and Edward Deci that employees react well to intrinsic motivators such as job competence, autonomy and a connection to the work they are doing. Successful leaders are helping their employees do this from wherever they’re working. Training shouldn’t be scaled back during a downturn, in fact it’s the perfect opportunity to train people up in new skills and make them future-ready.

Just because you’re working remotely doesn’t mean you should constantly check in with your team to make sure they’re working.

Good leaders should entrust them to do the work you’ve assigned, and hold them accountable if they don’t perform. Using technology can help you monitor progress without micro-managing. Finally, use video calls and gamification to engage your remote employees and remind them of the organisations purpose and vision. Help them connect the dots between the work they’re doing (even from home) and the value you’re aiming to deliver to clients.

COVID-19 has seriously impacted all industries, but now is the time for leaders to step up and guide their organisations into the new normal.

By addressing these four points, they will retain and motivate your team, and emerge from the pandemic stronger than ever before.

**To learn more about Mark, visit [www.global-innovation-speaker.com](http://www.global-innovation-speaker.com) or contact Mark at [mark@anagram-group.com](mailto:mark@anagram-group.com).**

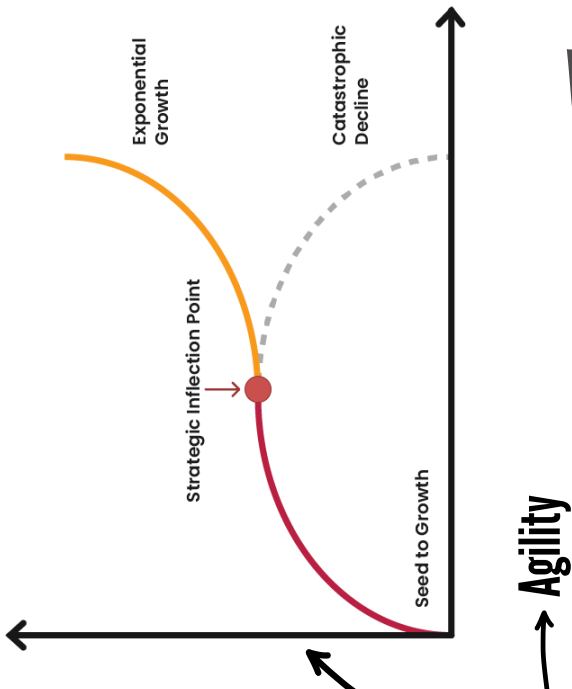


## Leadership In A Digital Age (LIDA) Framework

Framework I developed for future-proofing leaders based on successes in organisations

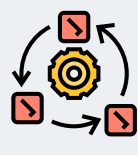


## Inflection Point in the Future of Work



### Agility

1. The biggest challenge = speed of change
2. The clearer the strategy, the more agile you can be
3. Agile leadership is being able to react to market changes or new technological advances with speed



LEARNING | INNOVATION | DATA | AGILITY

### Data

1. Data: everyone has it, not everyone knows what to do with it
2. Organisations need a data strategy
3. Data requires substantial investment



LEARNING | INNOVATION | DATA | AGILITY

## LEADING IN CHALLENGING TIMES by Mark Stuart, CSP



### Learning

1. Learn and Relearn
2. Upgrade your skills, be future-ready
3. Keep abreast of new technology developments impacting your industry and company



LEARNING | INNOVATION | DATA | AGILITY

### Innovation

1. Innovation of your products & services
2. Build & reward an innovative culture
3. Keep improving your Customer Experience (CX)



LEARNING | INNOVATION | DATA | AGILITY

# LEADING IN CHALLENGING TIMES

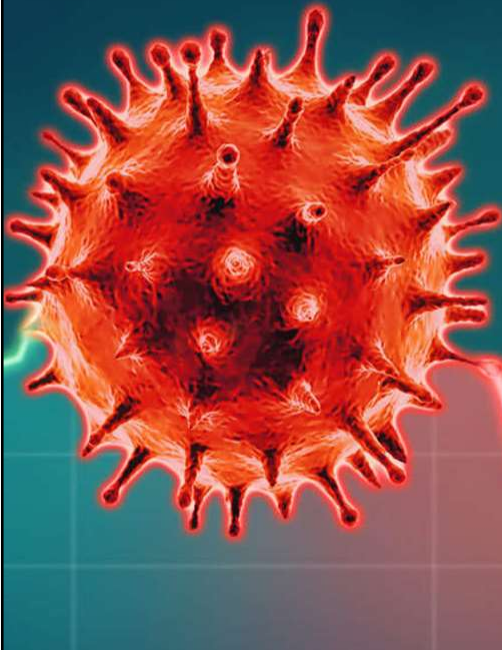


MARK STUART, CSP  
VIRTUAL SPEAKER

SMF X IBTM Wired 28 June 2021

In partnership with **ibtm** WIRED **SACE** SINGAPORE

1



## Impact on MICE Industry, 2020

92% of international events – canceled, postponed, converted online

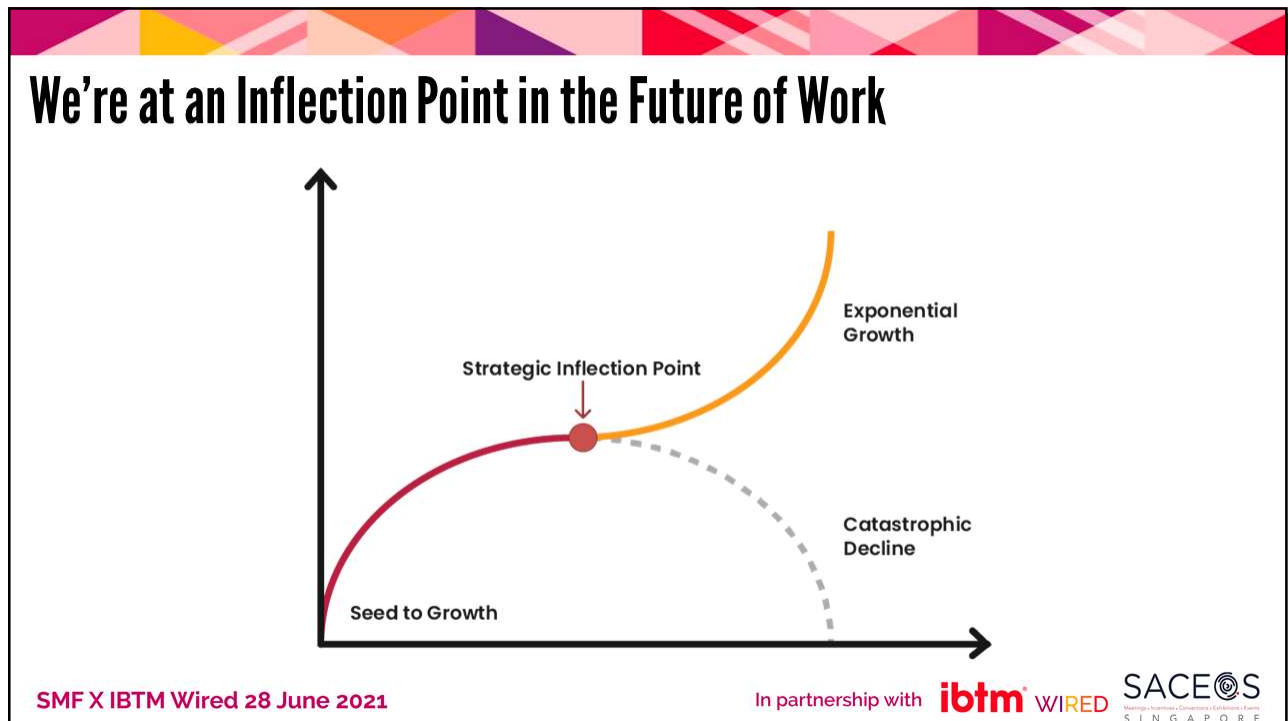
85% decrease in tourists, lowest in almost 40 years

2





3



4



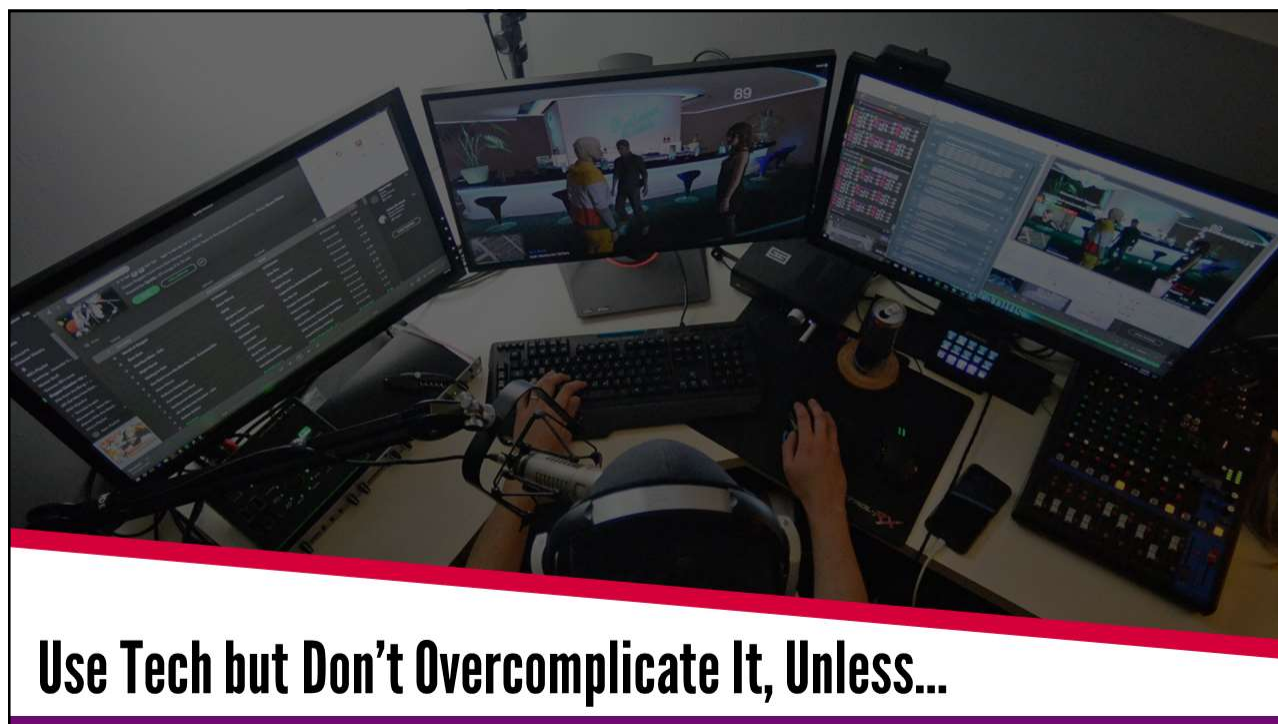
“  
**Instead of playing defensive, we went  
offensive**  
”

**Don Tsai, Project Director  
First Wave Agency**

5

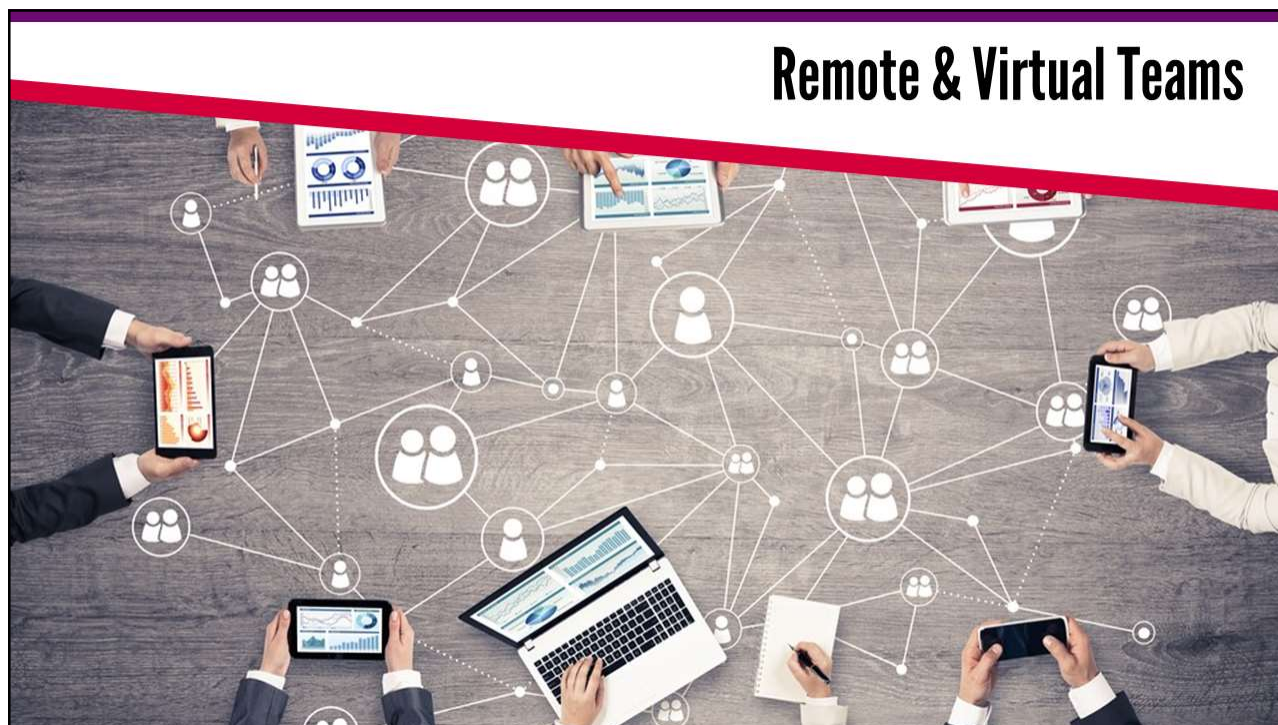


6



**Use Tech but Don't Overcomplicate It, Unless...**

7



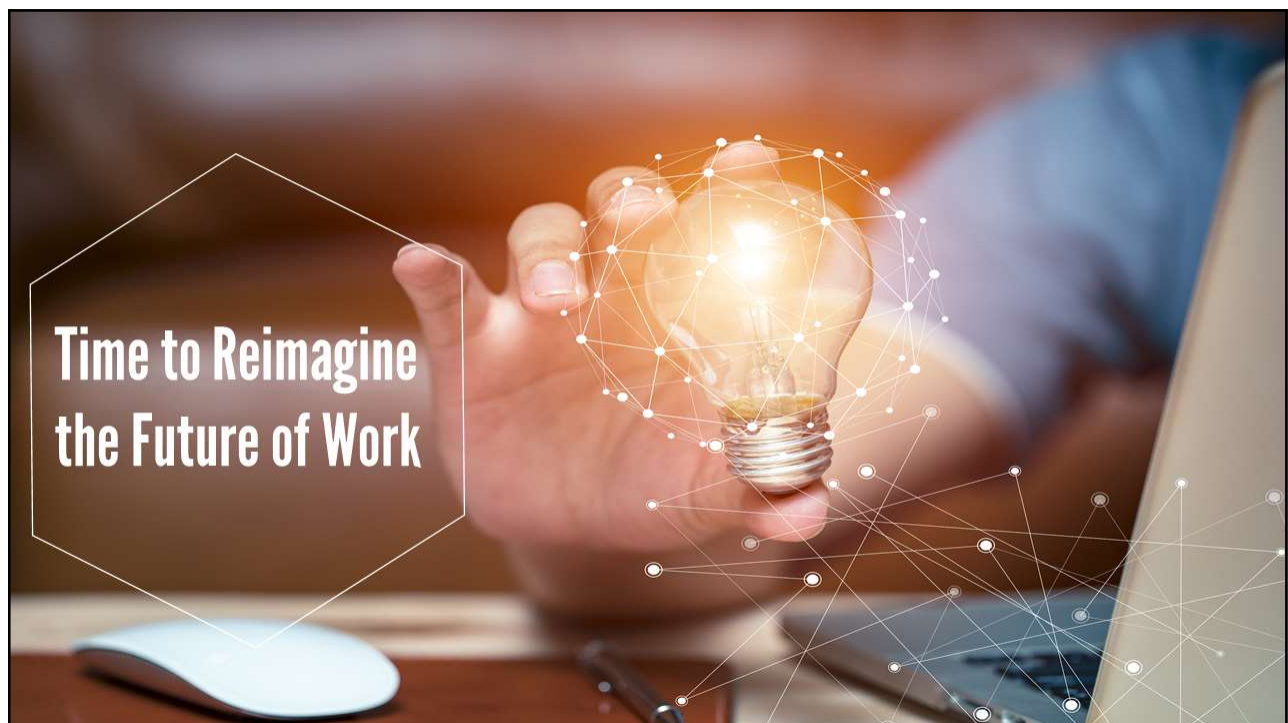
**Remote & Virtual Teams**

8



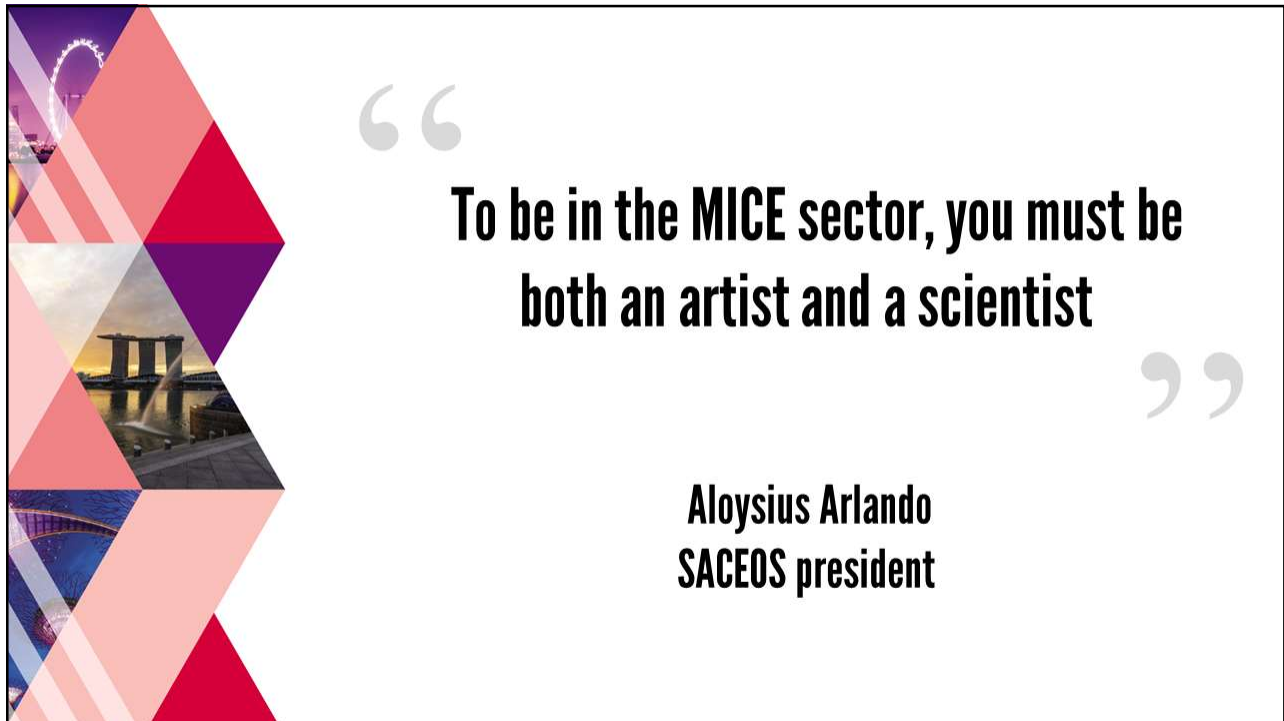


9



10





11



12

# The Leadership In A Digital Age (LIDA) Framework

- Framework I developed for future-proofing leaders based on successes I saw in organisations
- 4-step, non-sequential framework, can be implemented all at once



SMF X IBTM Wired 28 June 2021

In partnership with **ibtm** WIRED **SACE** SINGAPORE

13

## LEARNING



- Learn and Relearn
- Upgrade your skills so you are future-ready
- Keep abreast of new technology developments impacting your industry and company

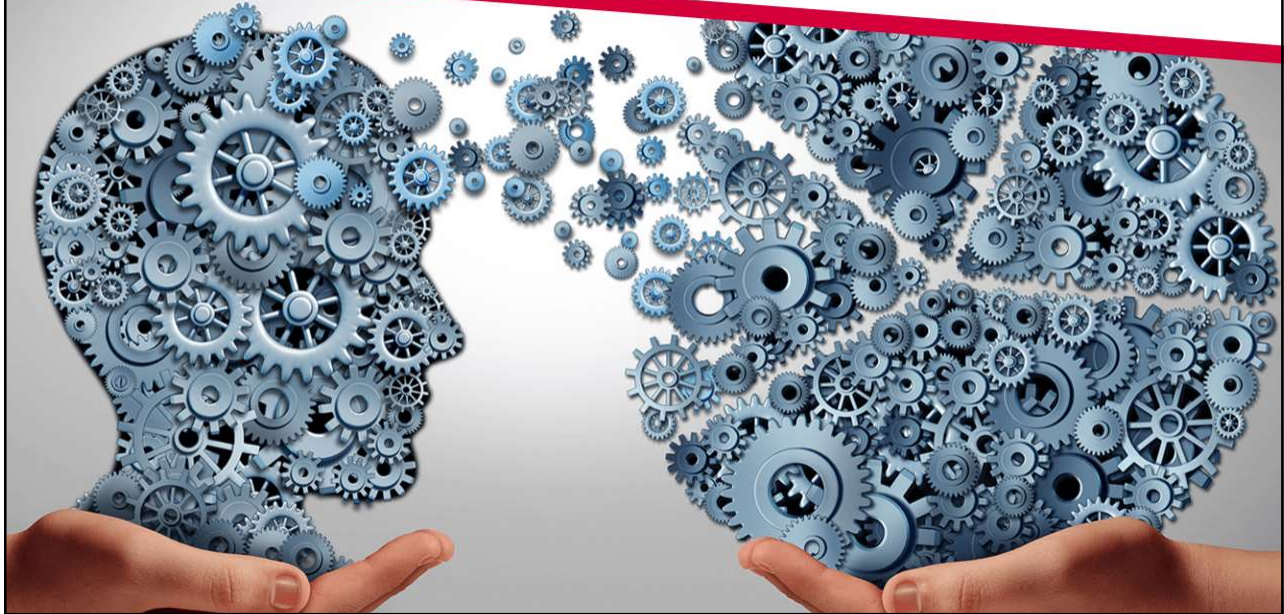
LEARNING | INNOVATION | DATA | AGILITY

SMF X IBTM Wired 28 June 2021

In partnership with **ibtm** WIRED **SACE** SINGAPORE

14

## Reskilling to Meet Future Needs



15

## INNOVATION



- Innovation of your products & services
- Build and reward an innovative culture
- Keep improving your Customer Experience (CX)

LEARNING | INNOVATION | DATA | AGILITY

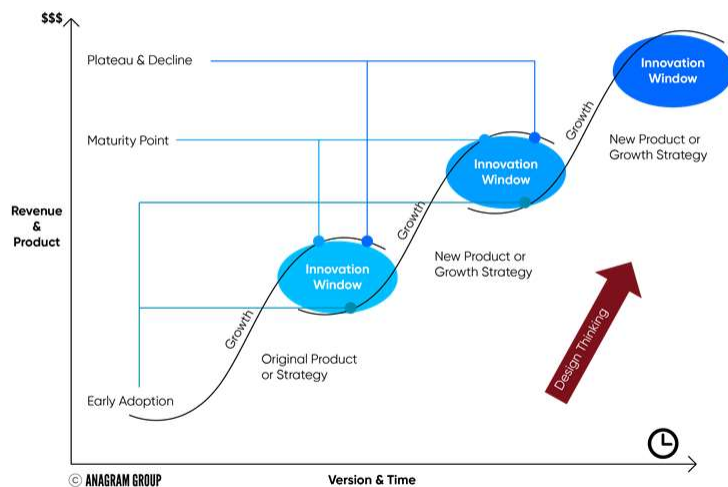
SMF X IBTM Wired 28 June 2021

In partnership with **ibtm** WIRED **SACE** S  
SINGAPORE

16



# S Curve of Innovation



SMF X IBTM Wired 28 June 2021

In partnership with **ibtm** WIRED SACEOS SINGAPORE

17

# DATA



- Data: everyone has it, not everyone knows what to do with it
- Organisations need to have a data strategy
- Data requires substantial investment

LEARNING | INNOVATION | DATA | AGILITY

SMF X IBTM Wired 28 June 2021

In partnership with **ibtm** WIRED SACEOS SINGAPORE

18





19

**OR DECISION-MAKING?!?**

- Data: everyone knows what to do with
- ...to have a data strategy
- ...requires substantial investment

28 June 2021

In partnership with **ibtm** WIRED **SACEOS** SINGAPORE

20

# AGILITY



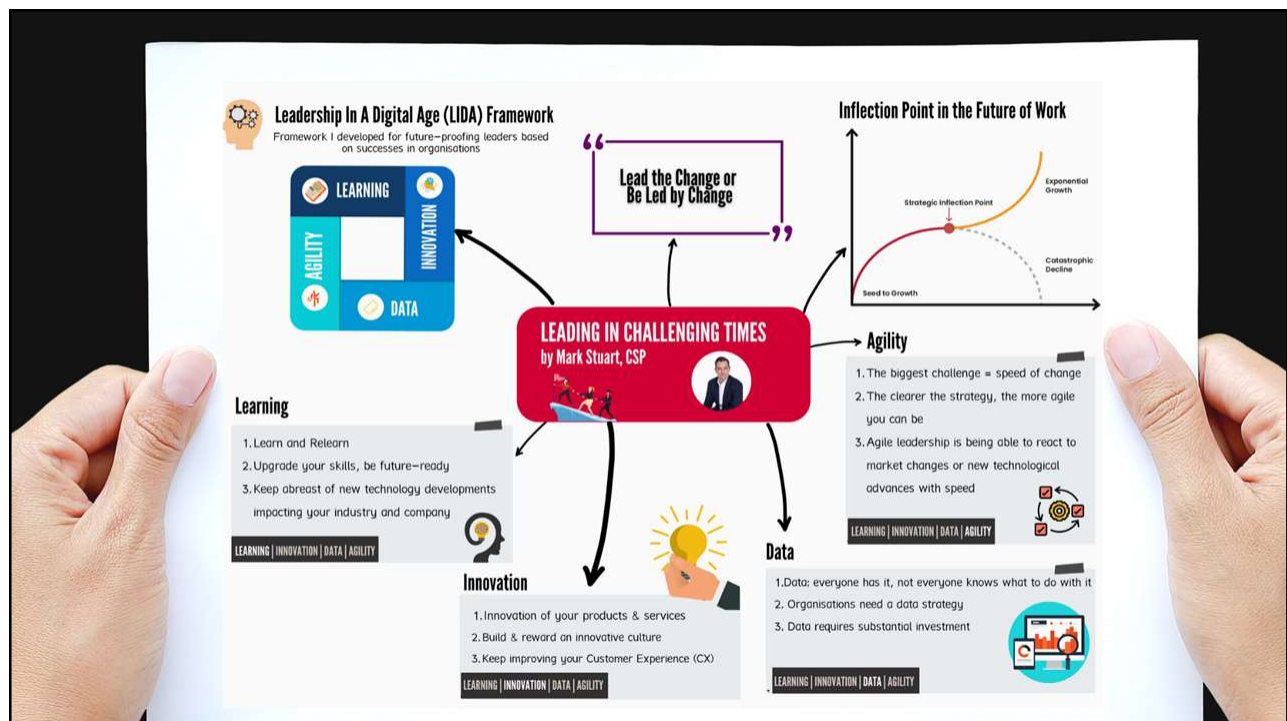
- It's the speed of change that's the biggest challenge.
- The clearer the strategy, the more agile you can be
- Agile leadership is being able to react to market changes or new technological advances with speed

LEARNING | INNOVATION | DATA | AGILITY

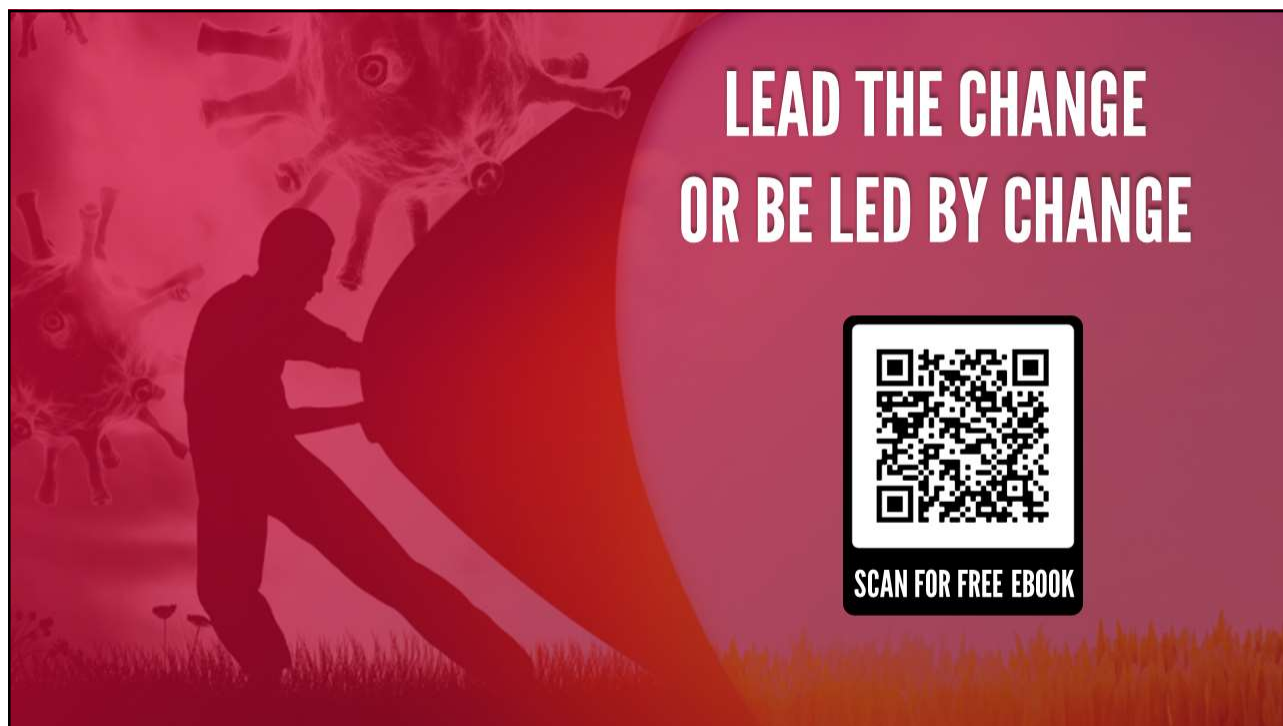
SMF X IBTM Wired 28 June 2021

In partnership with **ibtm** WIRED **SACEOS**  
SINGAPORE

21



22



23



# MARK STUART, CSP

Asia's Leading Innovation Expert  
Engage Mark for your next keynote  
speech - virtual OR in-person!



## INNOVATION

What Asia's leading companies are  
doing to build a culture of innovation



## LEADERSHIP IN A POST-PANDEMIC AGE

Managing remote and tech teams,  
leading, motivating and engaging teams  
in a digital age



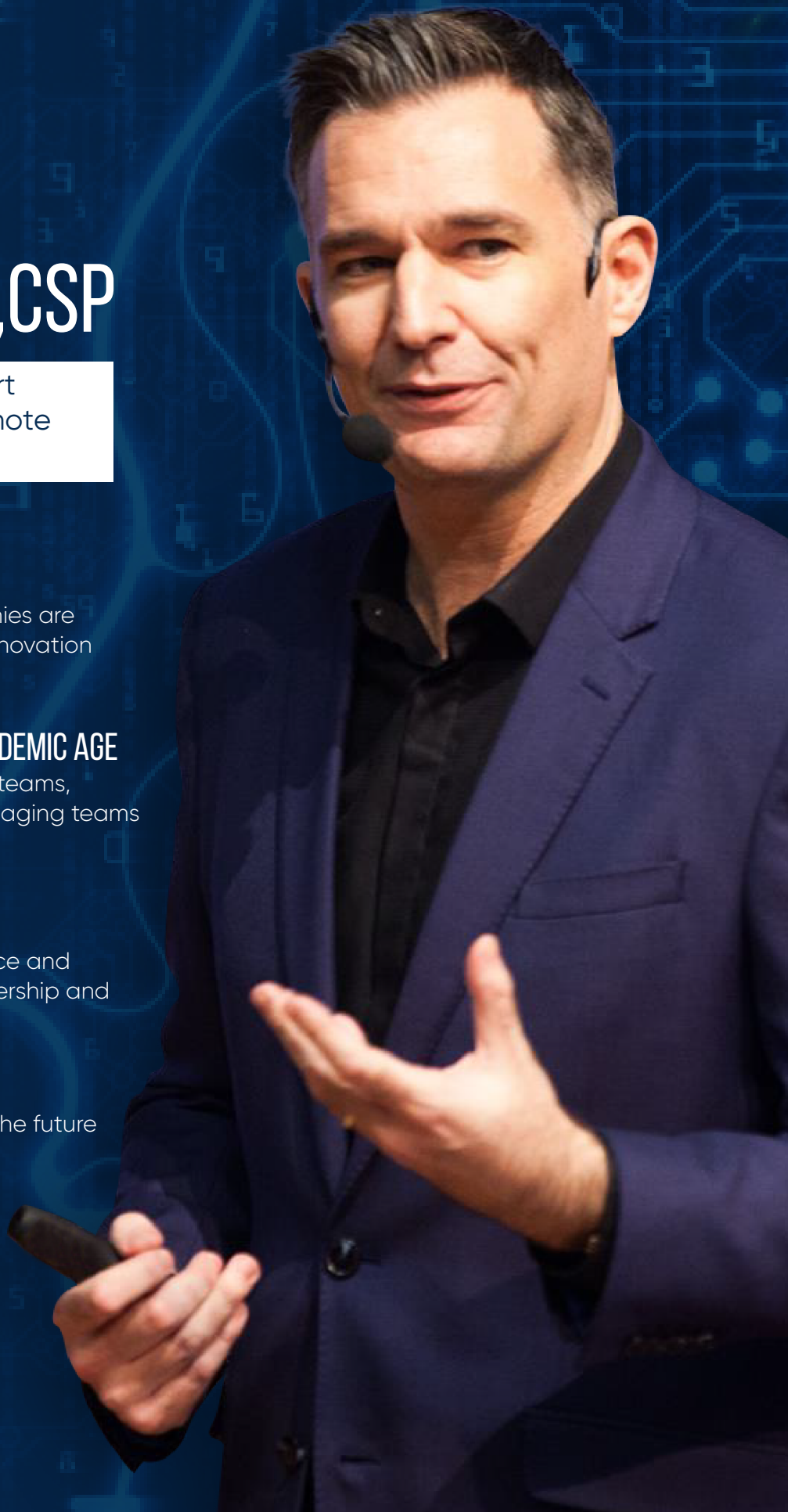
## AI / AR / TECH

Impact of Artificial Intelligence and  
Augmented Reality on Leadership and  
Business



## FUTURE OF WORK

Managing the workforce of the future



For more info, visit [www.global-innovation-speaker.com](http://www.global-innovation-speaker.com)