



BUSINESS AGILITY COURSEWORK

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February 2021

Executive Summary

The coursework will present the key factors of agile companies, with capabilities to sense and act appropriately to environmental changes (Overby, et al., 2005). Its context is COVID – 19, an unprecedented health crisis that upended organization and consumer behaviors (Bain & Company, 2020). While the whole economy suffered from the worst fallout since 1945 (The World Bank Group, 2020), agile organizations gain competitive advantages (Boston Consulting Group, 2020), (Accenture, 2020). The second part will analyze the services operations of Walmart, Inc., identify their agility factors, before evaluating Walmart's adaptability given challenging circumstances like COVID – 19.

Part A: Core Elements of Agile Organizations, proven results in COVID – 19

An agile organization starts with a clear purpose. This is a long – term value proposition that resonates with both the company's internal and external environment (Melewar, et al., 2005).

While such identity is stable, which helps companies remain distinctive, it embodies changes (Christopher & Edward, 2009). The agility strategic values are, therefore, customer-centric, as opposed to short-term financial metrics (Denning, 2015). With those, organizations can continually meet customers' flexible demands (Oijen, 2020). For example, Alibaba Group's mission is "make it easy to do business anywhere" (Alibaba Group, n.d.), which represents community – driven business agility. In COVID – 19, their strategies immediately mobilized the Alibaba ecosystem to combat the crisis (Wong, 2020) (Appendix 1). Aligned with the mission of "make it easy to do business everywhere", they leveraged Alibaba Cloud's e – commerce live streaming solutions to assisted brick – and – mortar stores in online transitions. Not only were Alibaba's business partners saved from ruination (Sheffi, 2020), (Alibaba Cloud, 2020), (Alibaba Group, 2020), but its year – over – year revenue also increased 34% in June Quarter 2020 (Wu, 2020) (Appendix 2)

Agile business demands an interdependent structure. It must be built upon "teams" or "squads" tied by shared purposes (Brosseau, et al., 2019) (Appendix 3). In general, agile organization contains networks of mission – focused, adaptable teams that are not subject to hierarchical accountabilities and power (Deloitte, 2018) (Appendix 4). Therefore, the whole business can leverage the power of cross – functional collaborations and diverse backgrounds to adapt to unprecedented and complex issues (Deloitte, 2013). Take Accenture Finance, which assembled a COVID – 19 response team with brand new four workstreams, and collaborated with Accenture's global IT team to build COVID – 19 dashboard for clients (Accenture, 2020). Thus, the consulting firm delivered insights to clients for critical decision – making, while reached financial goals on time (Accenture, 2020) in the pandemic.

Agility structure requires an effective decision – making that is synchronized across departments (Batra, 2020) (Appendix 5). Cost – benefits tradeoffs considered (Winter, 2003), this accelerates time to create values. For instance, Johnson Controls wanted to seize supplying medical equipment to a hospital of 1,000 COVID – 19 patients in New York, a project which normally took 6 months (Tita, 2020). However, different operations inside Johnson Controls such as production, logistics, and design were aligned in the hospital project, thus completing the mission in just 20 days (Bernadine, et al., 2020).

The whole scheme would be impossible without agile leadership and human capital. The agile leader will identify, seize and reshape activities for the dynamic team (Helfat & Peteraf, 2014), (Teece, 2007). Additionally, such leadership requires an augmented workforce beyond traditional full – time employees (Deloitte, 2020) (Appendix 6), with multi-functional competences (Camps, et al., 2016), such as technical know – how, business expertise, and interpersonal skills (Batra, et al., 2016). Take the CEO of Etsy, an American e – commerce company that normally connects independent artisans with customers. As soon as he sensed the rising demands for face masks in COVID – 19, he mobilized over 20,000 face mask selling contractors within a few days of the public health guidelines (Clifford, 2020). Esty then experienced booming sales, and the year – over – year revenue for the 2020 2nd quarter was up 136,7% (Esty, Inc., 2020).

The final agility element is the technological capacity. Artificial intelligence (AI) and data science (Sejnowski, 2018) can provide organizations with risk intelligence in various business areas (Tilman, 2019), thus revealing novel insights to turn uncertainties into opportunities (Batra, 2020). Salesforce innovated products for digital, work – from – home practices (GlobalData, 2020), including leveraging AI to support seamless customer experience (Salesforce, 2020). Thus, sales and marketing leads grew by 29% (GlobalData, 2020), generated 12,000 new jobs post – crisis (Benioff, 2020).

In conclusion, COVID – 19, or rapidly changing environments in general, favors organizations with agility reflected in their business strategies, structure, process, people, and technology.

Part B: Analysis of Walmart, Inc.'s Service Operations

Agility inside Walmart, Inc.

Walmart, Inc. (henceforth Walmart) is the largest retail corporation worldwide by revenue (Statista, 2021). With 11,400 physical stores and e-commerce websites (Walmart, Inc., n.d.), Walmart aims to develop omnipresent retail channels, offer a seamless customer experience, while maintaining its historic value proposition of “everyday low price” (EDLP) (Walmart, Inc., n.d.), (Walmart, Inc., 2020)

Speed drives retail outperformance (Lowe, et al., 2014). For e-commerce, the churn rate due to long shipping time was 36% (Statista, 2018). To ensure maximum delivery capacities (Batista, 2009), retailers can utilize same-day delivery (SDD)– store fulfillment, which leverages the closest supply store to complete online orders. This would accelerate delivery speed while providing fringe benefits like store pickups, flexible return services (Ni, 2018). Walmart implemented one – day (NextDay Delivery) (Lore, 2019) and less – than – 2 – hour delivery (Express Delivery) (Walmart, Inc., 2020), based on a network of strategically located fulfillment centers around its customers (Appendix 7). Although the company held about 7% of e – commerce sales in America only (Statista, 2020), this indicated their commitment to increase customer loyalty besides offline channels (Neslin, et al., 2006). Their e-commerce sales grew by 97% as of Q2 FY2021 (Statista, 2021).

Meanwhile, the firm develops a reliable, high – quality supply chain. Amidst food poisoning cases, food traceability would create competitive advantages (Webb, 2004), (Wang & Li, 2006). Groceries being the dominant product categories (Statista, 2020), Walmart implemented a block-chain – integrated food tracking system (Appendix 8), which reduced time to track mango provenance from 7 days to 2.2 seconds (Hyperledger, 2019) (Appendix 9). This initiative increases transparency in its food stream and avoid interruptions from health – related issues (Yiannas, 2017), (Kharif, 2016). Therefore, end-users could continually enjoy fresher food, while restaurants and cafeterias might rely on that to improve quality assurance (Van Kralingen, 2016). BrandSpark Must Trusted Awards 2021 ranked Walmart 1st in customers' trust for grocery pickups (Newsweek, 2021) (Appendix 10).

Corporate flexibility is tied to changing employment practices (Wood, 2016). Temporal flexibility, which empowers employees to choose their own working shifts (Holdman, 2013), is highlighted as both an employee engagement booster (Kalleberg, 2011), (Holdman, 2013) and a staffing outlay budget – reduction scheme due to increasing customer demands (Lambert, 2008). Walmart, therefore, uses *My Walmart Schedule* app (Appendix 11). Scheduled shifts are automatically generated based on staff availability and customers' traffic hours. Associates could view scheduled hours, switch swifts to others, and pick unfilled extra hours 24/24 (Walmart, Inc., 2018), thus mobilizing a sufficient human capital to serve customers.

Global Insight revealed that each American household saved \$2,500 yearly shopping with Walmart (Global Insight, 2005). Cost – efficient and eco – friendly inventory management continually enables Walmart's EDLP (Cleary & McLarney, 2019). Inventory storage cost is shifted to suppliers (Mottner & Smith, 2009) thanks to a few intermediaries in their supply chain (Appendix 12). Besides, about one – third of Walmart's operations is powered by renewable energy, in a mission towards zero emissions by 2040 (Appendix 13). Sustainability strategies simultaneously save goods packaging and delivery – affiliate costs (Nilufer, 2020) for this company.

Proven results in COVID – 19

This analysis leverages the disrupting COVID – 19 in the U.S. to illustrate Walmart's great agility as the top national corporate responders to pandemic (Fortune 500, 2020).

Walmart's value proposition has been "helping people around the world save money and live better" (Walmart, Inc., n.d.). This reduces customers' uncertainties with stable costs (Nilufer, 2020), thus maintaining its leading position in the global retail market (Statista, 2021). During crisis time, the organization harnessed this pricing strategy to gain a competitive edge (Saxena & Sharma, 2011) when demands for staple categories surged (J.P. Morgan, 2020), (OECD, 2020), (McKinsey & Company, 2020) (Appendix 14).

With an integrated structure, Walmart became the cornerstone of fast – paced changes. Even in COVID – 19, it mobilized 74,000 personal shoppers to run Express Delivery (Walmart, Inc., 2020), by sharing job alerts to a network of over 70 companies and establishing temporary employment program for their laid-off workers (Walmart, Inc., 2020).

Technological mastery is the means to all Walmart's ambitions. They manifested their risk intelligence in the pandemic by offering contact – free payment and pickup (Walmart, Inc., 2020). More than a thrust upon for personal safety, the contactless interface is the future of global retail, preferred by tech – savvy consumers like millennials and gen Z (Omarini, 2018) because it saves time and raises convenience (Lomax, 2005). As Walmart harnesses digital transformation at a fast pace, its global prevalence will follow. To illustrate, Walmart's e-commerce shares in India have reached over 98% (Statista, 2020).

In conclusion, customer-centric values, structure, human capital, and technology are the key agility components for Walmart to remain competitive and spearhead global retail market trends.

Customer satisfaction is the key

According to the Kano model, what once satisfies users will soon be perceived as basic needs (Kano, et al., 1984). Given unpredictable time, customers' expectation alters accordingly. Walmart puts customers' values first. In turbulent environments, this strategy enabled Walmart to serve every customer. For example, they launched exclusive shopping and pick-up hours (Walmart, Inc., 2020) for the highest-risk group in COVID – 19 (aged 65 and above) (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020). While more than half of old people never purchased food items online (Statista, 2020) (Appendix 15), the frequency is reversed compared to that of 18 – 24 year – olds. By simultaneously addressing demands from various age groups, despite COVID – 19, Walmart grew significantly in e-commerce sales (Statista, 2021) while remained a retail store giant.

To conclude, customer-centric strategies help Walmart create omnipresence in different retail channels, deliver a seamless experience under any circumstances.

(1640 words) (Excluding Titles)

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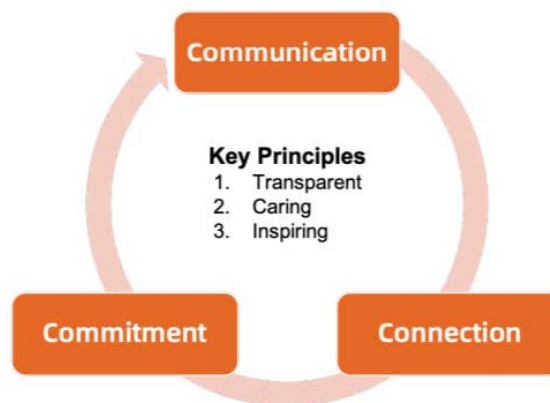
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Appendix

Appendix 1: Alibaba Group's 3C Strategy in COVID – 19

3 C Strategy

- ① **Communication** – Staying in touch with what's happening on the battlefield via real-time status-sharing
- ② **Connection** – Finding ways to stay connected to each other to battle COVID-19
- ③ **Commitment** – Inspiring people to continually perform well in difficult situations



Appendix 2: Alibaba Group's financial statement in June Quarter 2020

JUNE QUARTER SUMMARY FINANCIAL RESULTS

	Three months ended June 30,			
	2019	2020		
	RMB	RMB	US\$ ⁽¹⁾	YoY % Change
	(in millions, except percentages and per share amounts)			
Revenue	114,924	153,751	21,762	34%
Income from operations	24,375	34,705	4,912	42%
Operating margin	21%	23%		
Adjusted EBITDA ⁽²⁾	39,238	51,039	7,224	30%
Adjusted EBITDA margin ⁽²⁾	34%	33%		
Adjusted EBITA ⁽²⁾	34,556	45,372	6,422	31%
Adjusted EBITA margin ⁽²⁾	30%	30%		
Net income	19,122	46,437	6,573	143% ⁽³⁾
Net income attributable to ordinary shareholders	21,252	47,591	6,736	124% ⁽³⁾
Non-GAAP net income ⁽²⁾	30,949	39,474	5,587	28%
Diluted earnings per share ⁽⁴⁾	1.01	2.17	0.31	115% ⁽³⁾
Diluted earnings per ADS ⁽⁴⁾	8.06	17.36	2.46	115% ⁽³⁾
Non-GAAP Diluted earnings per share ^{(2) (4)}	1.57	1.85	0.26	18%
Non-GAAP Diluted earnings per ADS ^{(2) (4)}	12.55	14.82	2.10	18%

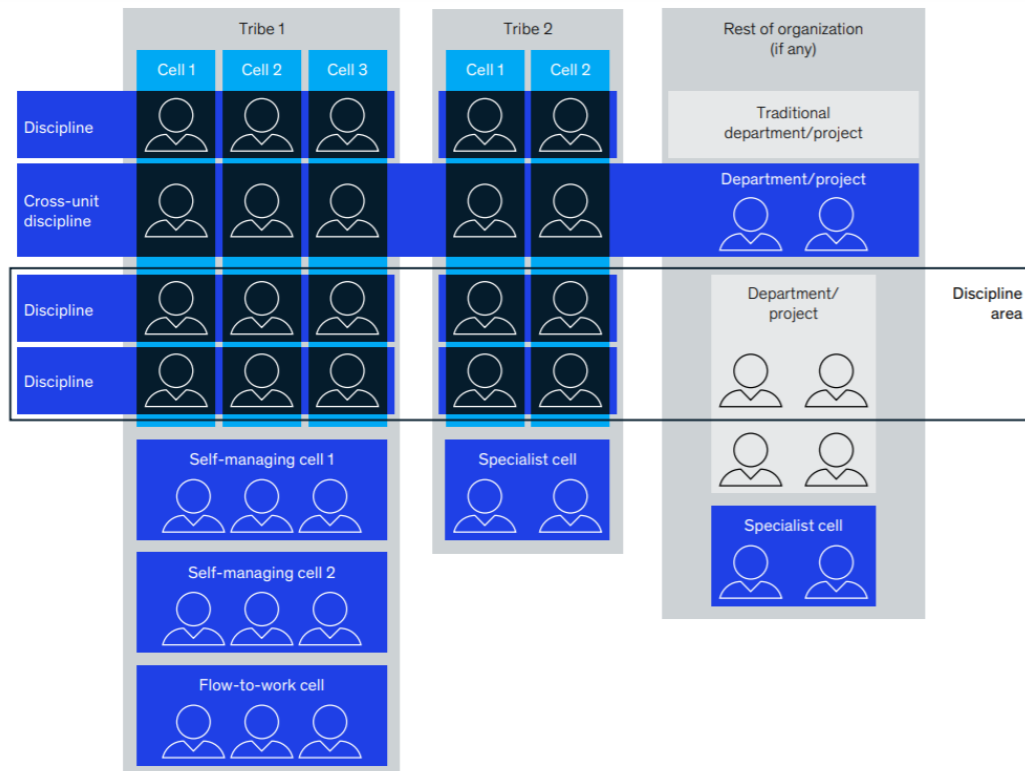
(1) This results announcement contains translations of certain Renminbi ("RMB") amounts into U.S. dollars ("US\$") and Hong Kong dollars ("HK\$") for the convenience of the reader. Unless otherwise stated, all translations of RMB into US\$ were made at RMB7.0651 to US\$1.00, the exchange rate on June 30, 2020 as set forth in the H.10 statistical release of the Federal Reserve Board, and all translations of RMB into HK\$ were made at RMB0.91344 to HK\$1.00, the middle rate on June 30, 2020 as published by the People's Bank of China. The percentages stated in this announcement are calculated based on the RMB amounts and there may be minor differences due to rounding.

(2) See the sections entitled "Information about Segments," "Non-GAAP Financial Measures" and "Reconciliations of Non-GAAP Measures to the Nearest Comparable GAAP Measures" for more information about the non-GAAP measures referred to within this results announcement.

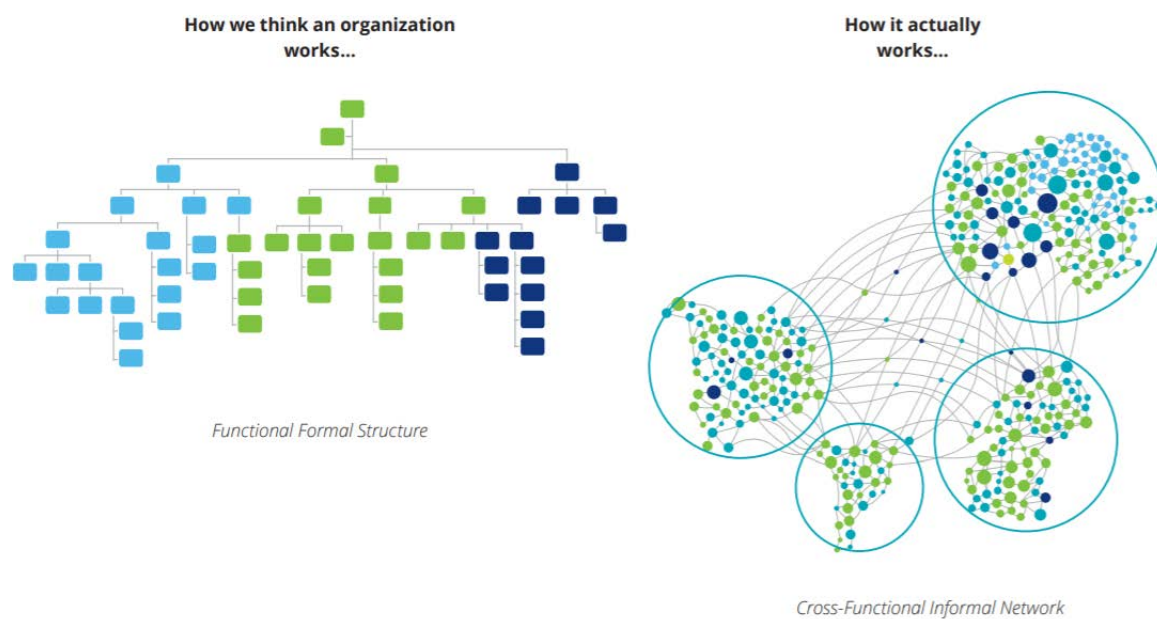
(3) The year-over-year increase was mainly due to a net gain arising from increases in the market prices of our equity investments in publicly-traded companies in the quarter ended June 30, 2020, compared to a net loss arising from the decrease in the market prices of these equity investments in the same quarter of 2019.

(4) Each ADS represents eight ordinary shares, which reflects the share subdivision and ADS ratio change that became effective on July 30, 2019.

Appendix 3: Inside an agile team



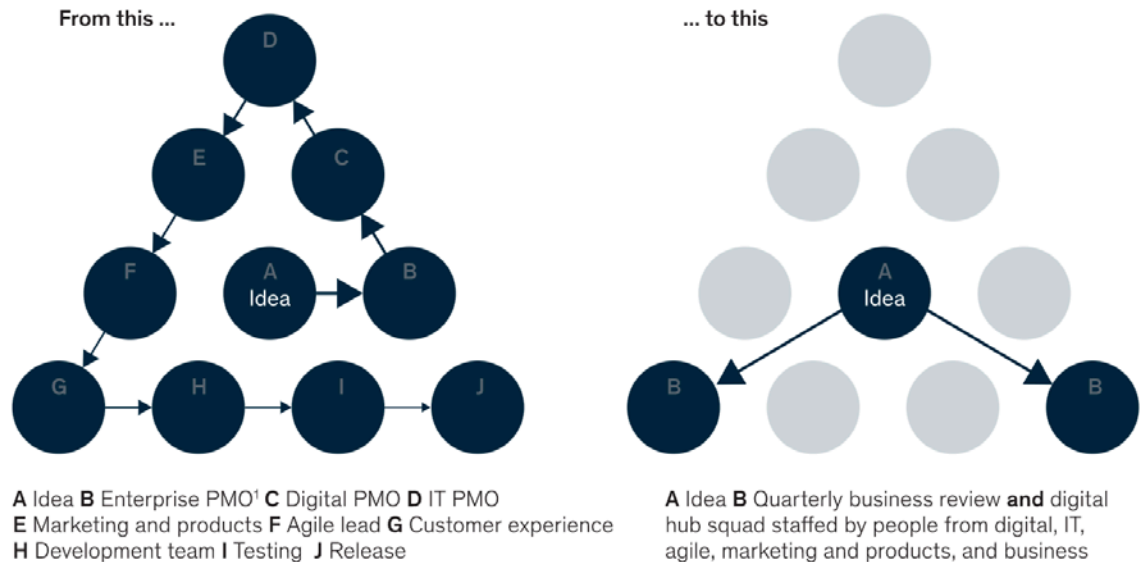
Appendix 4: Inside an agile organization



Appendix 5: Inside the decision – making process of an agile team

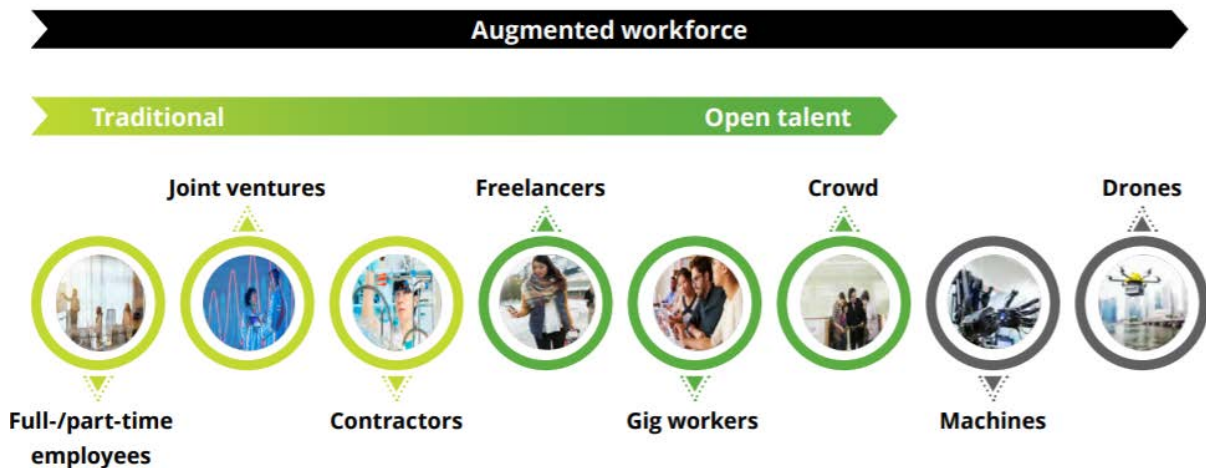
Agile transformation considerably streamlined the idea journey at an Asia-Pacific telco, resulting in increased customer satisfaction.

Agile transformation streamlining

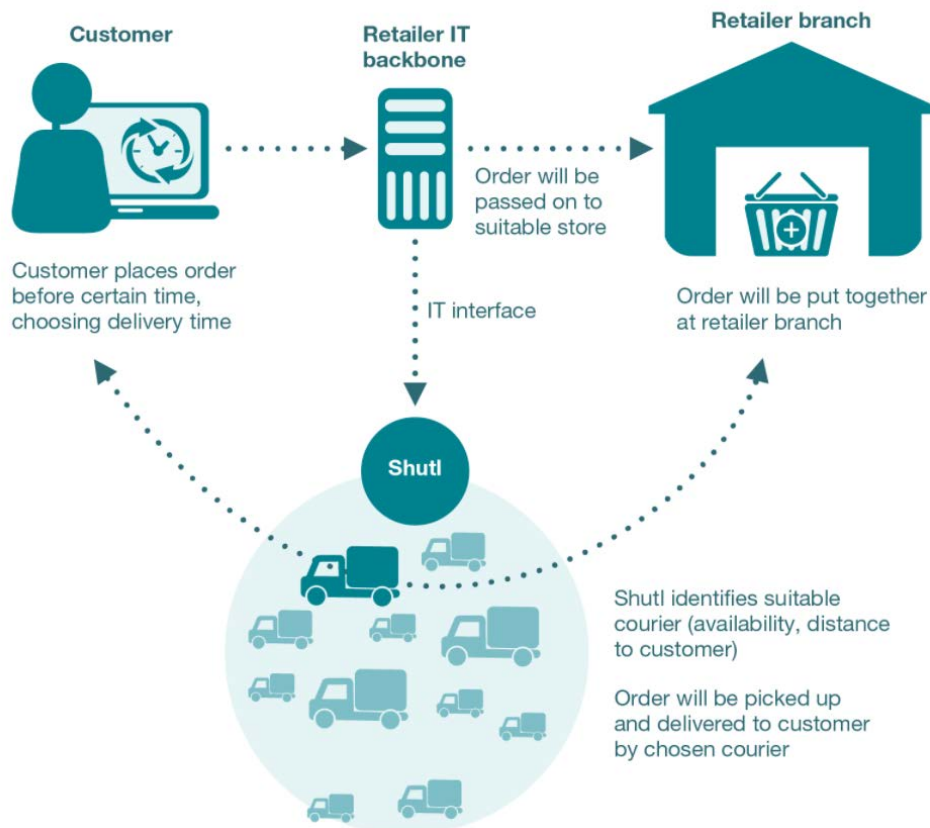


¹Project management office.

Appendix 6: Augmented workforce in an agile organization



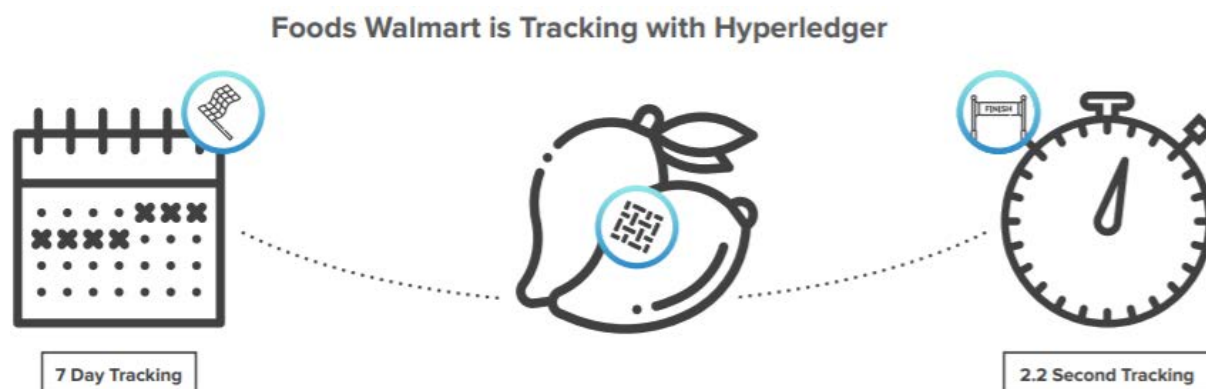
Appendix 7: Walmart's SDD model



Appendix 8: Walmart's blockchain technology to track food provenance



Appendix 9: Walmart's mango traceability efficiency



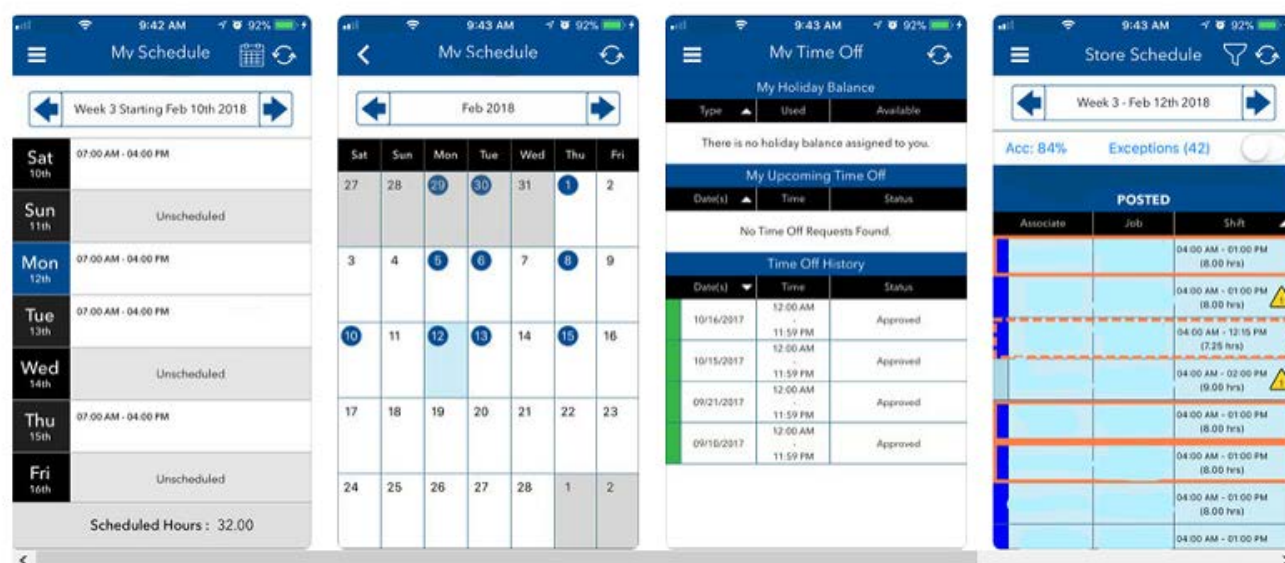
Appendix 10: BrandSpark Most Trusted Awards 2021

SEGMENT	CATEGORY	GOLD	SILVER	BRONZE
E-Commerce	Athletic Shoes	Amazon / Nike (tie)		
E-Commerce	Bedding & Linens	Amazon	Bed Bath and Beyond	
E-Commerce	Books	Amazon		
E-Commerce	Contact Lenses	1-800 Contacts		
E-Commerce	Cosmetics	Amazon / Ulta (tie)		Sephora
E-Commerce	Craft Supplies	Amazon / Michaels (tie)		Hobby Lobby / Joann (tie)
E-Commerce	Electronics	Amazon	Best Buy	
E-Commerce	General Goods	Amazon	Walmart	
E-Commerce	Glasses/Prescription Eyewear	Zenni		
E-Commerce	Grocery Delivery	Amazon / Walmart (tie)		Instacart
E-Commerce	Grocery Pick-up	Walmart		

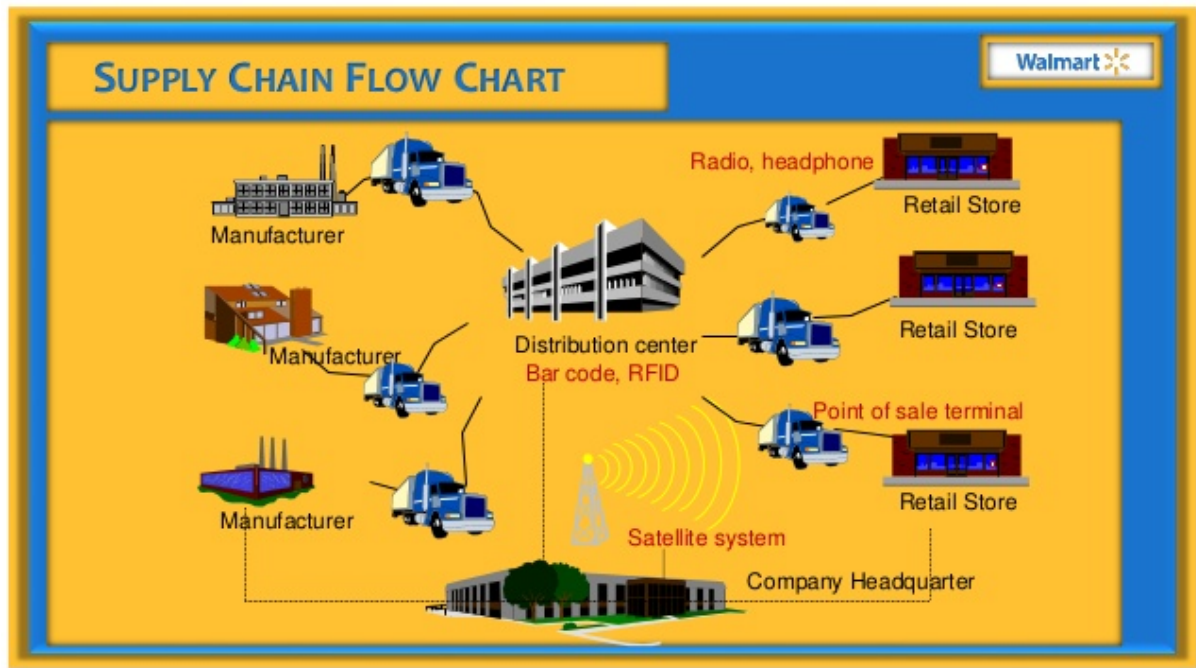
Appendix 11: My Walmart Schedule app

App Store Preview

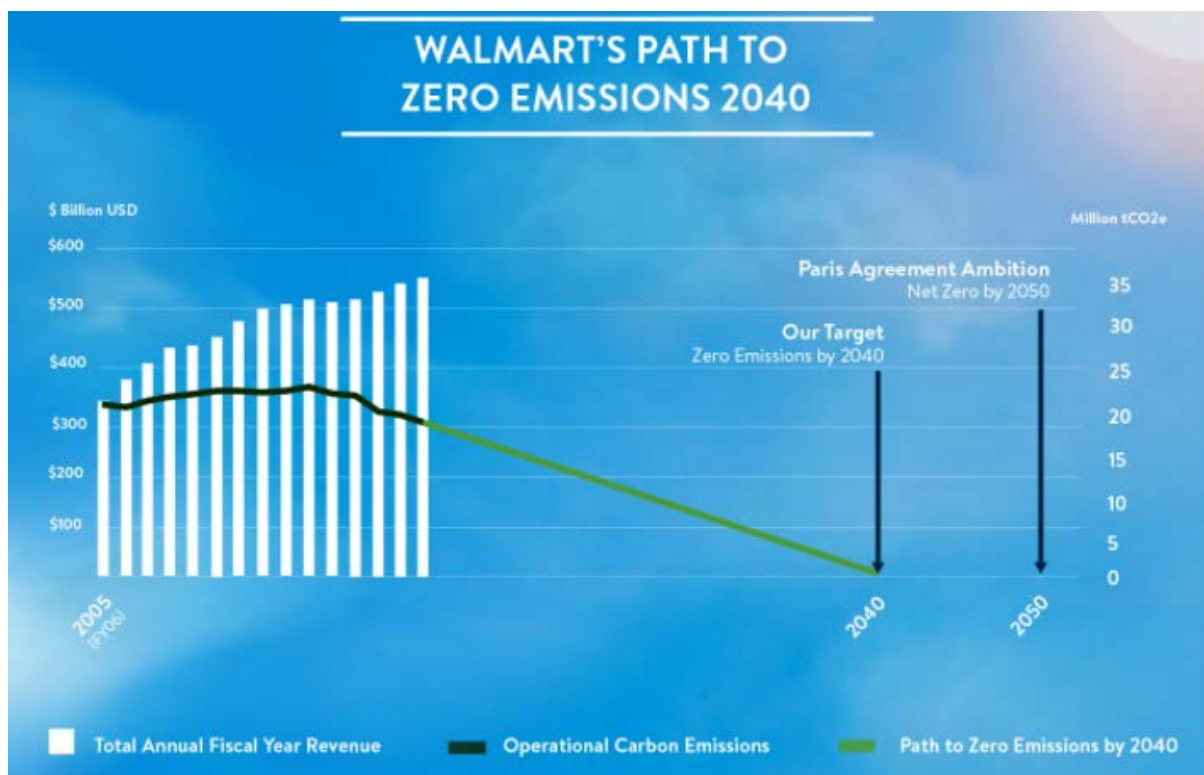
iPhone Screenshots



Appendix 12: Walmart's inventory management model with few intermediaries



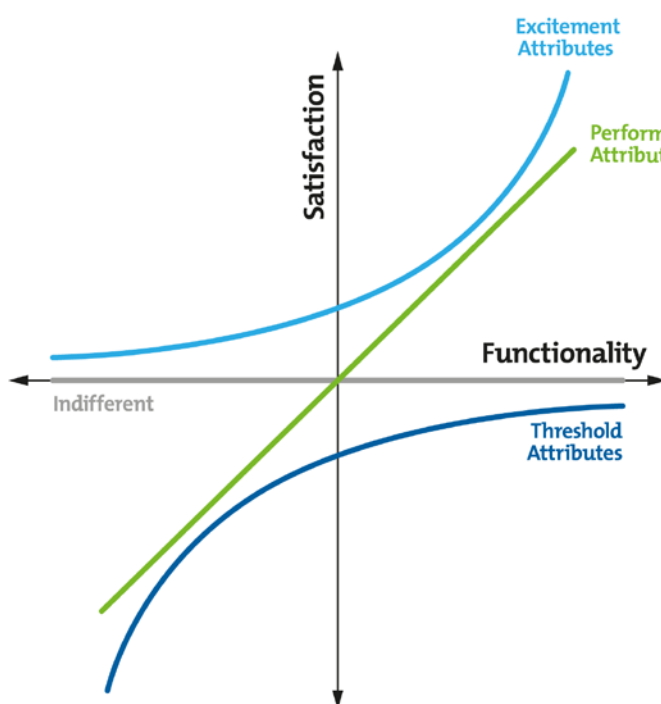
Appendix 13: Walmart's corporate sustainability



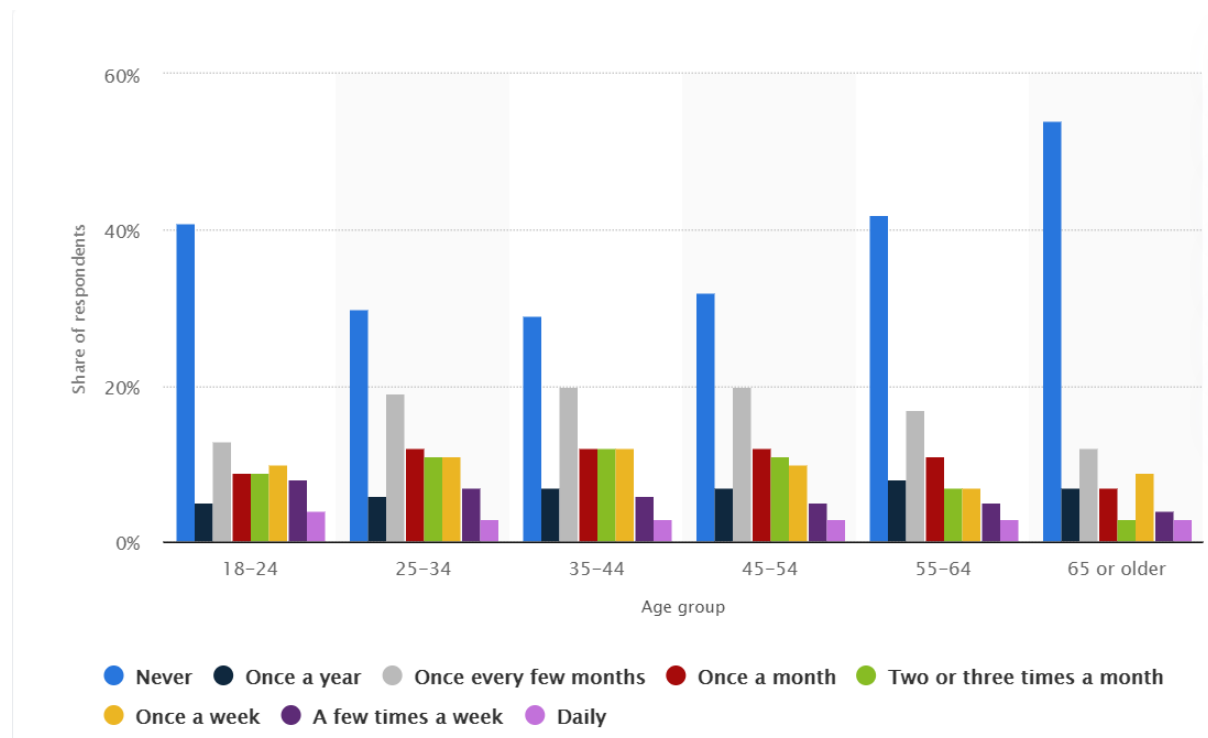
Appendix 14: Demand for essential goods in COVID – 19 in America



Appendix 15: The Kano Model about customers' expectation



Appendix 16: Online shopping preferences, distributed by age groups



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