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Enhancing Software Reliability and Effort Estimation in Agile Development: Data-Driven Approaches and Methodological Insights

Shams Tabrez Siddiqui[1], Mohammed Mukkaram Ali[2], Mohammed Maqsood Ali[3], Khalid Ali Qidwai[4], Abu Salim[5]
[1, 4, 5]*Department of Computer Science, College of Engineering and Computer Science, Jazan University, Jazan, 45142, Saudi Arabia*
[2]*Lecturer in Cyber Security Program, Applied College, Jazan University, Jazan, 45142, Saudi Arabia*
[3]*Lecturer in Cyber Security Program, Applied College, Jazan University, Jazan, 45142, Saudi Arabia*

Abstract: ***Agile software development emphasizes flexibility, collaboration, and iterative progress, yet ensuring software reliability and accurate effort estimation remains challenging in dynamic environments. This paper provides a detailed analysis of approaches to enhance reliability and effort estimation in agile practices. This exploration of traditional versus agile processes emphasizes the significance of data-driven techniques, such as historical data analysis and machine learning, in enhancing predictive accuracy. Essential methodologies, including ongoing testing, velocity tracking, and robust quality assurance are discussed to address issues like frequent requirement changes and scope creep. Practical insights and actionable recommendations are offered to support practitioners in delivering dependable software and managing resources effectively in agile projects. The study aims to contribute to the ongoing optimization of agile methodologies for improved project outcomes.***
Keywords: Agile software, software reliability, effort estimation, data-driven techniques, quality assurance.

I. INTRODUCTION

Agile software development, which emphasises teamwork, iteration, and adaptability, has revolutionised the software business. Waterfall and other conventional software development methods struggle with current software projects' rapid change. Agile methods encourage adaptive planning, iterative development, early delivery, and continuous improvement while enabling quick and flexible change [1]. Agile software development, despite its popularity, has unique problems, particularly in software stability and effort estimation. High-quality goods require software reliability, which is the chance of software running without failure for a set period under specific conditions. Agile environments threaten reliability due to frequent changes and continuous delivery cycles. Strong testing and proactive quality assurance are needed to ensure software reliability during development [2]. Project management also requires effort estimation, which estimates the time and resources needed to execute a project or assignment. Agile project planning, resource allocation, and schedules depend on precise effort estimation. Agile initiatives are particularly difficult to estimate effort due to their ambiguity and fluidity. Agile-specific estimation methods are often needed when conventional methods fail [3].

The need to overcome these challenges and understand agile software dependability and effort estimation approaches prompted this study. This research examines and analyses existing approaches, practices, and technologies to offer practical advice and insights to improve agile project efficiency.

A. Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of this study are:

1) Identify key issues for assuring software dependability and accurate effort estimation in agile contexts, considering the particular characteristics of agile approaches.
2) Evaluate strategies and practices used by agile teams to increase software dependability and effort estimation accuracy. This includes both proven and new approaches.
3) To investigate data-driven approaches: To examine how data-driven techniques, such as historical data analysis and machine learning, might improve effort estimation accuracy in agile projects.

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II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Software reliability is an important aspect of software quality since it reflects a system's or component's ability to fulfil essential operations under specified conditions for a set amount of time. It encompasses several aspects, including fault tolerance, failure rate, and availability. Ensuring high software reliability is paramount for delivering robust and dependable software products [4].

A. Concepts in Software Reliability

- Fault Tolerance: This concept pertains to the ability of a software system to sustain its operational integrity despite the failure of specific components [6].
- Failure Rate: The frequency with which software failures manifest, typically expressed as the number of failures occurring within a specified time frame.
- Mean Time to Failure (MTTF): The average period during which a system operates effectively prior to experiencing a failure.
- Availability: The proportion of time during which a system remains functional.

B. Reliability Improvement Techniques

- Testing: Finding and fixing bugs requires thorough testing methodologies like unit, integration, system, and acceptability testing.
- Fault Tolerance Mechanisms: Fault tolerance mechanisms, including as redundancy, failover, and recovery methods, are employed to improve the system's ability to handle faults [6].
- Code Reviews and Inspections: Regular code reviews and inspections aid in the early identification of potential issues and enhance the quality of the code.

C. Software Reliability Models

Several models have been proposed to quantify and predict software reliability, such as:

- Jelinski-Moranda Model: As software defects are found and fixed, software dependability increases [5].
- Musa-Okumoto Model: The Musa-Okumoto Model considers the period between failures and anticipates the failure rate to decrease as the software matures [6].
- Goel-Okumoto Model: Based on failure data, the non-homogeneous Poisson process Goel-Okumoto Model predicts the number of remaining faults.

D. Common Effort Estimation Techniques

- Expert Judgment: Uses the knowledge and gut feelings of specialists to arrive at estimations. Methods like Wideband Delphi and Delphi itself are examples of this type of technique [7].
- Analytical Models: A mathematical model serves as a tool to approximate the effort necessary for a project, considering various parameters.
  - COCOMO (Constructive Cost Model) provides an estimation of effort by analysing the dimensions of the software project alongside various project characteristics.
  - Function Point Analysis: Assesses the effort required by evaluating the functionality delivered to the user.
- Empirical Models: Predict effort by utilising historical data from earlier initiatives. Regression models and machine learning are two popular empirical techniques [8].
- Decomposition Techniques: First, divide the project into smaller, more manageable jobs, and then estimate the amount of work that will be required for each individually. Both the Work Breakdown Structure (WBS) and Planning Poker are examples of such structures.

TABLE I: COMPARISON OF TRADITIONAL AND AGILE METHODOLOGIES [2-5]

Aspect	Traditional Methodologies	Agile Methodologies
Development Approach	– Phased development with sequential phases (Waterfall model).	– Iterative development in small, incremental cycles (Sprints).

Planning Approach	– Predictive planning with upfront detailed documentation.	– Adaptive planning to meet changing needs and input.
Flexibility	– Limited flexibility to accommodate changes once underway.	– High flexibility to respond to changes and incorporate feedback.
Collaboration	– Less emphasis on collaboration; often hierarchical.	– Close collaboration among team members and stakeholders.
Strengths	– Clear structure and milestones. – Comprehensive documentation.	– Flexibility to adapt to changes. – Continuous delivery. – Customer collaboration.
Weaknesses	– Rigidity in adapting to changes. – Delayed issue detection.	– Estimation challenges. – Difficulty in scaling for large projects or distributed teams.
Impact on Software Reliability	– Fast-paced development may introduce risks without rigorous QA practices.	– Agile practices enhance reliability through continuous testing and early issue detection.
Impact on Effort Estimation	– Traditional methods use detailed planning for effort estimation.	– Agile uses relative estimation techniques like story points and velocity tracking.
Techniques Used	– Phased development. – Predictive planning. – Sequential process. – Comprehensive documentation.	– Iterative development. – Adaptive planning. – Collaboration and communication. – Continuous delivery. – Customer interaction.
Notable Practices	– Waterfall model, V-model.	– Scrum, Kanban, Extreme Programming (XP).
Adaptability	– Less adaptable to modifications after project start.	– High adaptability with continuous feedback and reprioritization.

III.AGILE SOFTWARE DEVELOPMENT

Agile software development depends on a set of concepts and practices that prioritize adaptability, cooperation, and customer contentment. The Agile Manifesto, released in 2001, delineates four fundamental values and twelve principles that steer agile methodologies [8].

A. Values of the Agile Manifesto

- Individuals and Interactions Over Processes and Tools: This principle emphasises the significance of collaboration and communication among team members, prioritising human connection over strict adherence to processes or dependence on equipment.
- Prioritising Functional Software Over Extensive Documentation: It underscores the importance of developing operational software that offers value, placing this above the creation of comprehensive documentation.
- Prioritising Customer Collaboration Rather than Contract Negotiation: This approach emphasises the active engagement of clients throughout the project to guarantee that their requirements and expectations are fulfilled, prioritising collaboration over formal contractual agreements.
- Prioritising Adaptability Over Rigid Planning: It fosters responsiveness to change and encourages flexibility instead of tight compliance with a predetermined plan.

B. Key Principles of Agile

- Customer Satisfaction Through Early and Continuous Delivery: Customer satisfaction through early and continuous delivery requires regularly delivering valuable software, preferably in shorter time constraints.
- Accepting Changes: Agile procedures use changes, even at late phases of development, to give customers a competitive edge.
- Business and Development Teams Work Closely Daily: Daily, close collaboration between business stakeholders and developers ensures successful collaboration and communication.
- Delivery of Working Software: Software is given often, usually between weeks to months, but shorter intervals are desirable.
- Projects Built Around Motivated Individuals: Projects that give employees the environment, support, and confidence to accomplish their jobs [8]. Informing someone face-to-face is the most effective and efficient method.
- Constant Focus on Technical Excellence and Quality Design: Quality design and technical excellence improve agility.
- Sustainable Development: The functionality of the program being delivered should be the main indicator of project progress. Sustainable development means continuing development at the same rate.
- Simplicity: Maximising unfinished work or focussing on what's important [9].
- Self-organising Teams: Agile teams evaluate and change their performance to improve.
- Regular Reflection and Adjustment: Teams routinely reflect on their work and processes to find areas for improvement and make required adjustments to improve results.

C. Agile Frameworks: Scrum, Kanban, XP, and More

Agile includes several frameworks with different approaches and focus areas. The following Agile frameworks are popular [10]:

Scrum is a popular paradigm for managing and completing complicated software development projects. It promotes teamwork, accountability, and goal-oriented progress. Sprints, two- to four-week time-boxed iterations, break down work into smaller, manageable portions. Effective Scrum execution requires unique responsibilities. The Product Owner makes sure the team delivers value, prioritises the backlog, and represents customers and stakeholders. The Scrum Master promotes Scrum and addresses problems.

During each sprint, the cross-functional Development Team aims to ship product increments. Scrum organises and tracks work with key artefacts. The Product Backlog prioritises product features, upgrades, and fixes. The Increment contains all Product Backlog items from the current and prior sprints, whereas the Sprint Backlog contains the team's sprint tasks. Structured events provide alignment and ongoing progress in Scrum. Sprint Planning lists potential sprint requirements. The Daily Scrum is a brief meeting where the team discusses 24-hour tasks and strategies. The Sprint Review evaluates the increment and updates the Product Backlog at the sprint conclusion. Finally, the Sprint Retrospective lets the team review the sprint and make changes. These components make Scrum effective for iterative and incremental project development.

Kanban helps teams visualise their work, decrease WIP, and boost productivity. Kanban boards allow teams to manage tasks and plan their workflow, providing clear visibility. Kanban limits work-in-progress (WIP) by limiting the number of jobs at each workflow step. This identifies bottlenecks and improves workflow. Kanban emphasises task flow management, monitoring and improving it. It also recommends publishing workflow rules and recommendations to clarify process policies. Kanban relies on feedback loops to improve processes through meetings and input. Finally, Kanban pushes teams to collaborate and experiment to make progress using data and experimentation. Kanban works well for workflow management and team performance enhancement due to these principles.

Extreme Programming (XP) emphasises technical excellence and developer-customer collaboration. Increasing software quality and user responsiveness are its main goals. Software functionality and stability are ensured via test-driven development and continuous integration. Many XP techniques are foundational. Test-Driven Development (TDD) ensures functionality and reduces bugs by developing tests before coding. Pair Programming enhances code quality and information sharing by having two developers work together at a workstation. Continuous Integration merges and tests code updates regularly to find bugs early. To maintain quality and adaptability, XP developers refactor code to improve structure and behaviour.

XP also promotes shared accountability and collaboration through Collective Code Ownership, which allows all team members to alter any codebase. Simple Design ensures the software solution meets current needs without complication. Finally, XP promotes a Sustainable Pace, avoiding excessive overtime to sustain team productivity and well-being. These techniques make XP a solid framework for creating high-quality, customer-focused software.

IV. SOFTWARE RELIABILITY IN AGILE

Software dependability is an essential aspect of software quality that has a direct impact on the user experience, safety, and operation of the product. In agile environments, characterized by short development cycles and frequent releases, ensuring high reliability is crucial. Dependable software guarantees continuous performance and avoids any failures, offering users a reliable product [5].

A. Reasons for Software Reliability

- User Trust and Satisfaction: The development of user confidence and satisfaction is a direct result of reliable software, which in turn results in increased customer loyalty and favourable reviews [6].
- Operational Efficiency: The reduction of software defects results in a reduction in downtime and maintenance costs, thereby improving overall operational efficiency.
- Safety and Security: Reliability is of the utmost importance in safety-critical and sensitive applications to prevent security breaches and catastrophic failures.
- Market Competitiveness: Software products that meet regulatory standards and user expectations are more competitive in the market.

TABLE II: TECHNICAL ASPECTS OF TECHNIQUES TO ENHANCE RELIABILITY [5-6]

Technique	Key Technical Aspects	Technical Benefits
Test-Driven Development (TDD)	- Writing tests before code - Failing tests initially to guide development - Incremental code writing - Refactoring while maintaining test passes	- Early Bug Detection - Cleaner, More Maintainable Code - Codebase Self-Documentation
Continuous Testing	- Integration with CI/CD pipelines - Comprehensive automated test suites (unit, integration, system, acceptance) - Real-time feedback mechanisms	- Early Issue Detection - Faster Development Cycle - Increased Software Reliability
Automated Testing	- Use of automated testing tools (e.g., Selenium, JUnit) - Execution of various test types (unit, integration, system, acceptance) - Automated result comparison and reporting	- High Testing Efficiency - Reduced Manual Errors - Scalable Test Coverage

B. Software Reliability Calculation

1) Mean Time Between Failures (MTBF): MTBF is the average time between system failures. It is calculated as [5]:

$$\text{MTBF} = \frac{\textit{Total Operational Time}}{\textit{Number of Failures}}$$

Where:

- Total Operational Time is the sum of all the time periods during which the system was operational.
- Number of Failures is the total number of observed failures during the operational time.

2) Mean Time to Failure (MTTF): MTTF is the average time to the first failure. It is calculated similarly to MTBF but focuses on the initial period:

$$\text{MTTF} = \frac{\textit{Total Operational Time}}{\textit{Number of Units}}$$

Where:

- Total Operational Time is the sum of all the time periods during which the system was operational until the first failure.
- Number of Units is the total number of units being observed.

3) Mean Time to Repair (MTTR): MTTR refers to the average duration required to fix a system following a failure. It is calculated as follows [5]:

$$MTTR=\frac{Total\ Repair\ Time}{Number\ of\ Repairs}$$

Where:

- Total Repair Time is the sum of all the time periods taken to repair the system.
- Number of Repairs is the total number of repairs performed.

4) Reliability (R(t)): Reliability is defined as the likelihood that a system will operate without failure over a specified time period t. It can be calculated using the exponential distribution model:

$$R(t)=e^{-\lambda t}$$

Where:

- λ (lambda) is the failure rate, calculated as $\frac{1}{MTBF}$.
- t is the time period for which reliability is being calculated.

C. Effort Estimation Calculation in Agile

1) Story Points: Story points are a unit of measure for estimating the overall effort required to complete a user story. They are usually assigned based on complexity, risk, and uncertainty. There is no direct formula for calculating story points as it is a relative measure, but they are often derived through techniques such as Planning Poker [11].

2) Velocity: Velocity refers to the average amount of work a team accomplishes during a sprint, typically measured in story points. It is calculated as:

$$Velocity=\frac{Total\ Story\ Points\ Completed}{Number\ of\ Sprints}$$

3) Estimating Effort Using Velocity: To estimate the effort for future sprints, you can use the average velocity:

$$Estimated\ Effort\ (in\ sprints)=\frac{Total\ Story\ Points\ for\ Backlog}{Average\ Velocity}$$

4) Burn-Down Charts: Burn-down charts visually represent the remaining work versus time. The ideal effort remaining can be calculated as:

$$Ideal\ Effort\ Remaining=Initial\ Effort-(Velocity\times Elapsed\ Time)$$

5) Three-Point Estimation: Three-point estimation uses three values to improve the accuracy of effort estimates:

$$E=\frac{O+4M+P}{6}$$

Where:

- E is the expected estimate.
- O is the optimistic estimate (minimum effort required).
- M is the most likely estimate (most probable effort required).
- P is the pessimistic estimate (maximum effort required).

6) Function Points: Function points assess the functionality provided to the user by considering several factors, including inputs, outputs, user interactions, files, and interfaces. They are calculated using a standard method:

$$Function\ Points=\sum(Function\ Type\times Complexity\ Weight)$$

Where function points consist of various function types, including External Inputs, External Outputs, External Inquiries, Internal Logical Files, and External Interface Files. Each type is assigned a weight based on its complexity (low, average, or high).

D. Example Calculations

Example 1: Calculating MTBF

- Total Operational Time: 1000 hours
- Number of Failures: 5
- MTBF=$\frac{1000}{5}$= 200 hours

Example 2: Calculating Reliability over 50 hours

- Failure Rate (lambda λ) based on MTBF of 200 hours: λ=$\frac{1}{200}$
- Time (t): 50 hours
- R(t)= $e^{-50/200}$= $e^{-0.25}$ =0.7788

Thus, the reliability is approximately 77.88%.

Example 3: Estimating Effort Using Velocity

- Total Story Points for Backlog: 100
- Average Velocity: 20 story points per sprint

Estimated Effort (in sprints) =$\frac{100}{5}$ =5 sprints

By using these formulas and methods, Agile teams can more accurately estimate effort and ensure the reliability of their software products, leading to more predictable and successful project outcomes.

V. EFFORT ESTIMATION IN AGILE

In agile projects, effort estimation is an essential component for planning, managing resources, and establishing timeframes that are realistic. By ensuring that teams are able to meet timelines, properly deploy resources, and effectively manage the expectations of stakeholders, accurate estimating is essential [12].

A. Key Benefits of Accurate Effort Estimation

1) Effective Planning: One of the benefits of effective planning is that it provides a clear picture of the work that is involved, which helps in the planning of sprints and releases.

2) Resource Management: This ensures that the appropriate quantity of resources is assigned to each activity, so preventing either overallocation or underutilization of those resources [13].

3) Stakeholder Communication: This ensures that stakeholders are provided with transparency and that they are provided with realistic expectations regarding delivery deadlines.

4) Risk Management: Risk management is the process of identifying potential risks and uncertainties at an early stage, which enables proactive risk mitigation [14].

B. Data-Driven Techniques for Effort Estimation

There are substantial benefits and challenges associated with the use of data-driven techniques for effort estimation in agile software development contexts. Some examples of these techniques include historical data analysis and machine learning approaches [15].

C. Historical Data Analysis

1) Data Collection Framework

- Collect data from completed agile projects, including metrics like story points, velocity, sprint duration, defect rates, and effort deviations.
- Use tools like Jira or Trello for automated data extraction.

2) Data Analysis Techniques

- Trend Analysis: Identify patterns in velocity changes across sprints. For instance, if velocity consistently drops during the final phases of a project, address resource fatigue.
- Correlation Studies: Measure the correlation between effort estimates and actual completion times to adjust planning strategies.
- Benchmark Creation: Establish benchmarks for effort estimation accuracy and defect density based on similar past projects.

In a case study of a mid-sized software project with 10 sprints, historical analysis revealed that initial sprint velocity estimates were 20% lower than actuals. This insight led to revising estimation practices, reducing missed deadlines by 30% in subsequent projects.

D. Machine Learning Approaches

1) Develop Predictive Models

- Use machine learning algorithms like Random Forest, Gradient Boosting, or Support Vector Machines [15].
- Input features: story complexity, team size, past velocity, and technical debt levels.
- Output: Predict total effort in story points and likelihood of meeting deadlines.

2) Model Training and Validation

- Train models using past project datasets. For example, a dataset of 100 sprints with features like velocity and sprint length [16].
- Validate using K-fold cross-validation to ensure robust results.

3) Reliability Predictions

- Use models to predict potential defect densities based on code complexity and test coverage [17].
- For instance, higher-than-average complexity in sprint stories predicted a 40% increase in post-sprint defects, prompting proactive testing.

A Random Forest model trained on 50 historical agile projects accurately predicted effort estimates within a 10% margin for 85% of future sprints. Key predictors included sprint velocity trends and the number of dependencies between tasks.

TABLE III: IMPACT OF AGILE CHARACTERISTICS ON RELIABILITY AND ESTIMATION [10-13]

Agile Characteristic	Impact on Reliability	Mitigation Strategies	Impact on Estimation	Mitigation Strategies
Frequent Requirement Changes	Flexibility allows continuous alignment with customer needs but can introduce new bugs or regressions.	- Continuous Integration and Testing - Robust Version Control	Makes effort estimation challenging due to unpredictability.	- Dynamic Backlog Management - Adaptive Planning
Iterative Nature	Incremental improvements and frequent testing catch defects early.	- Incremental Testing - Regular Retrospectives	Continuous estimation and re-estimation adjust based on team's velocity and task complexity.	- Sprint Reviews - Velocity Tracking
Team Collaboration and Communication	Improved collaboration leads to better knowledge sharing and quicker defect resolution.	- Pair Programming - Daily Stand-Ups	Enhances understanding of requirements, leading to more accurate estimations.	- Planning Poker - Regular Feedback Loops
Adaptation and Learning	Emphasis on adaptation and learning improves reliability over time through regular reflection on past iterations.	- Regular Retrospectives - Continuous Improvement	Refines estimation techniques based on empirical data and past experiences.	- Historical Data Analysis - Incremental Adjustments

VI. DISCUSSION

Software dependability as well as effort estimation are significantly impacted by agile traits, such as iterative development, team cooperation, and frequent changes to requirements. More accurate and adaptive estimating methods, better code quality, and increased responsiveness to changes are all benefits of these practices.

To improve software reliability and estimation accuracy, agile practitioners need to embrace continuous improvement, make use of data-driven methodologies, and cultivate a cooperative team environment. Results can be greatly enhanced by putting best practices like automated testing, CI/CD, and TDD into practice.

VII. CONCLUSION

Software reliability and effort estimation are greatly enhanced by agile software development, which prioritises flexibility, collaboration, and continuous improvement. Agile methodologies improve software reliability and effort estimation by virtue of their adaptive, collaborative, and iterative nature. Agile teams are able to produce dependable software that satisfies customers' needs and can adjust to their evolving requirements because they follow best practices and use data-driven approaches. The utilisation of data-driven techniques, velocity monitoring, and story points is an effective strategy for estimating effort. In agile environments, reliability is contingent upon the implementation of techniques such as TDD, CI/CD, and automated testing. Agile approaches will become even more effective in diverse and complicated project environments as a result of continuing study and innovation in the field.

Software dependability and effort estimation are affected by agile traits, and this study adds to our knowledge of that. To aid agile practitioners in improving their processes and outcomes, it offers practical insights into best practices, data-driven methodologies, and real-world implementations, as well as practical advice.

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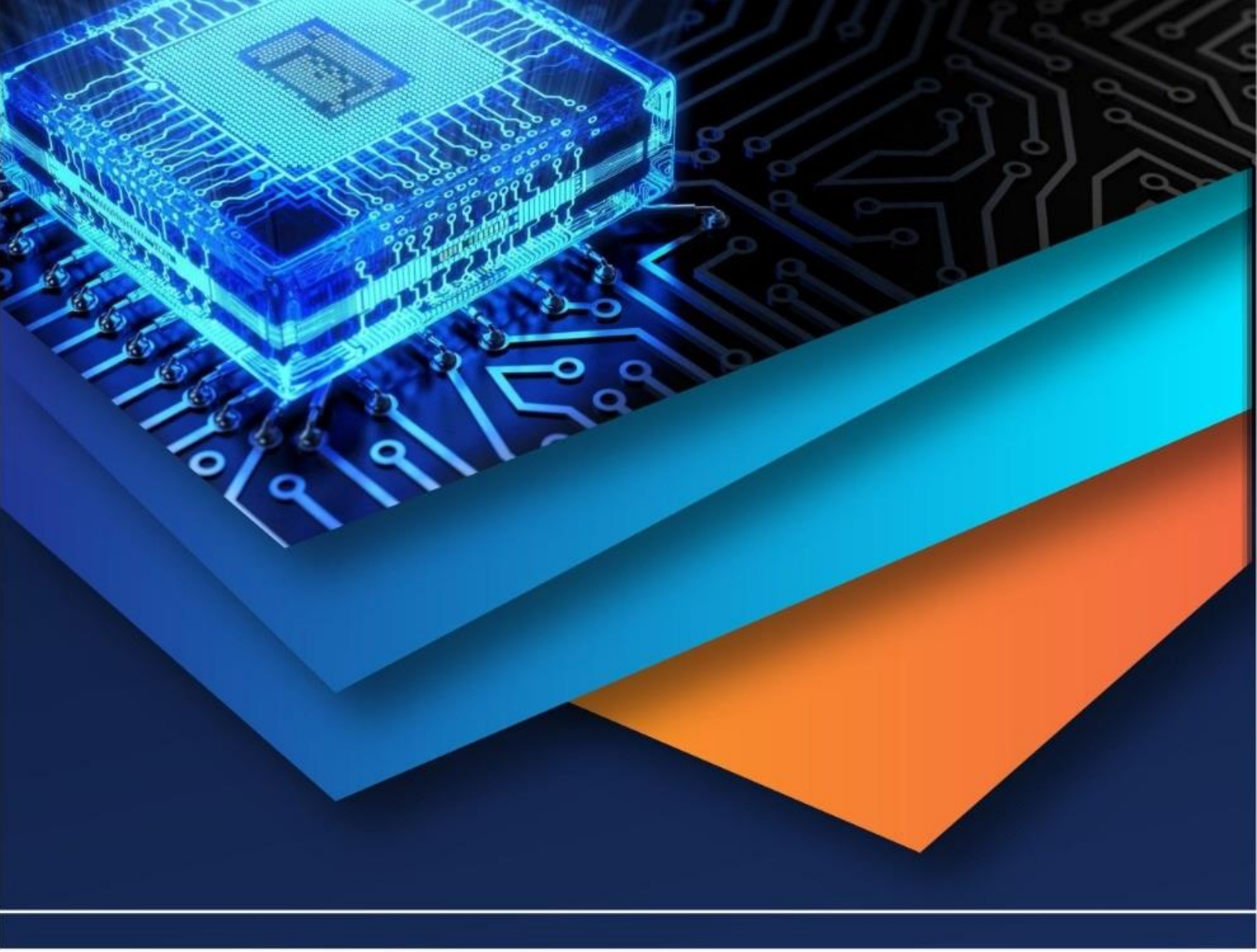

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