



VUCA

Leading Under Pressure and Crisis

May 2020 Newsletter

VUCA – an acronym introduced by the U.S. Army War College in the 80’s which has been adapted and become part of business and organizational vernacular over the last 20 years or so. It is used to describe the **VOLATILE**, **UNCERTAIN**, **COMPLEX** and **AMBIGUOUS** world we have been living in and has become the “go to” acronym to describe the ever-changing global business world.

V	U	C	A
Volatility	Uncertainty	Complexity	Ambiguity

As we are all experiencing COVID-19, VUCA is more relevant than ever and its 4 elements are now the game changer in how organizations alter and adapt their business models.

WHAT DOES VUCA MEAN FOR YOU AND YOUR ORGANIZATION?

“Bad companies are destroyed by crisis.
Good companies survive them. Great
companies are improved by them.”

Andy Grove, former CEO of Intel

In times past, each year businesses thought about their upcoming strategy, business priorities, competitors, challenges, talent needs, budgets, etc. Little did we know in January what that thinking would look like now. Today’s radical changes have necessitated in businesses having to adapt rapidly to meet the new business climate. No doubt many of those initial goals and objectives for 2020 have had to be adapted and remain in a state of flux.

Undoubtedly you are thinking about how COVID-19, Federal, State, and local demands are, and will, impact your business moving forward. **But as importantly**, how will the fallout from COVID-19 impact the behaviors of leaders, teams, and individuals? What will your new **VUCA Leadership model look like** in 6 months? In 12 months? In 18 months?

DO YOU HAVE THE RIGHT PEOPLE TO LEAD YOU OUT OF THIS CRISIS?

The knowledge, skills and attributes once needed by individual contributors, supervisors/managers and executives are **no longer sufficient** to operate in what will become the “new normal”.

WHAT IS REQUIRED TO “LEAD” AT EACH LEVEL

According to Bob Eichinger and Roger Pearman of TalentTelligent LLC everyone experiences pressure and crisis independently and managing it shows up differently by level:

- ◆ **Individual Contributors** do the “hands on” work and are often left to their own devices to cope
- ◆ **Managers/Supervisors** focus on people issues, keeping teams intact and become the “keepers” of engagement, culture, and conflict
- ◆ **Executives** need to work quickly to respond, keep the enterprise whole and motivated, and need to stay agile and resourceful while maintaining their presence

“The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy .”

Martin Luther King Jr.

WHAT BEHAVIORS ARE NOW MISSION CRITICAL?

Clearly **dealing with uncertainty and ambiguity** are now mission critical for everyone, but we can probably add:

- ◆ **Being resilient and resourceful**
- ◆ **Managing conflict**
- ◆ **Managing stress and emotions**

“It’s not the strongest species that survive, nor the most intelligent, but the ones who are most responsive to change.”

Charles Darwin

The research around how people really learn is associated with specific experiences – and the ability to draw meaning from that context (McCall, Lombardo & Morrison 1988 Seminal Study).

Pressure and **Crisis** are two of those **experiences we never really hope for** – but we do learn the most from them both.

To hear more from Bob and Roger, you can view their [2 VUCA webcasts](#) where they detail the unique Knowledge, Skills and Attributes (KSA’s) required at each level, and how to VUCA Proof your Organization.

VUCA PRIME

We can assume VUCA is here to stay. Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity and Ambiguity will never go away, but maybe it is time to look at VUCA slightly differently. In 2007, Bob Johansen with the Institute for the Future proposed a “flip” to the VUCA model: **VISION, UNDERSTANDING, CLARITY** and **ADAPTABILITY**.



As an organization, succeeding in today’s VUCA environment will require you to **develop individuals at all levels who can counter** volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity with vision, understanding, clarity, and adaptability. VUCA Prime can be used as a guide to help you identify the knowledge, skills and attributes that will drive performance and development moving forward.

Bill George a senior fellow at Harvard Business School, also argued that VUCA called for a new leadership response which he calls VUCA 2.0; an adaptation of VUCA Prime.

Given COVID 19 **“C”** may also require **COMPASSION** and **COURAGE (VUCA 2.0)** – the courage to change in the face of uncertainty and the compassion to manage individuals and teams out of a crisis. **“A”** will also require **AGILITY** or those that have no idea what to do when they don’t know what to do but will figure it out.

HOW TO ADDRESS VUCA:

- ◆ Determine the knowledge, skills and attributes that will be needed as you transition from COVID 19 – these will most likely be different than what was needed before
- ◆ Identify those most agile and able to be creative and innovative
- ◆ Develop existing employees to manage in a new VUCA world
- ◆ Build an organizational culture that will be more adaptive to a changing world, but will also address the new needs of employees

One thing is for sure; you cannot choose not to change when the world around changes. Response to change is mandatory. The only choice is how to respond. *Arras People*

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