The VUCA World (Acronym)
- **Volatility** - The nature, speed, volume, magnitude, and dynamics of change.
- **Uncertainty** - The lack of predictability of issues and events.
- **Complexity** - The confounding of issues and the chaos that surrounds any organisation.
- **Ambiguity** - The haziness of reality and the mixed meanings of conditions.

• What VUCA Really Means for You

It's become a trendy managerial acronym: VUCA, short for volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity, and a catchall for “Hey, it’s crazy out there!” It’s also misleading: VUCA conflates four distinct types of challenges that demand four distinct types of responses. That makes it difficult to know how to approach a challenging situation and easy to use VUCA as a crutch, a way to throw off the hard work of strategy and planning—after all, you can’t prepare for a VUCA world, right?

Actually, you can. Here is a guide to identifying, getting ready for, and responding to events in each of the four VUCA categories.
• 5 abilities a VUCA manager should have, develop or boost

As the world has become more complex and turbulent, research in human potential and neuroscience at the same time is increasingly revealing practical ways for leaders to develop the mindset and capabilities to lead in it. This research shows that the keys to leading in a VUCA world include possessing the knowledge, mindfulness, and ability to:

1. Create a vision and “make sense of the world.” Sense-making is perhaps more important now than at any time in modern history for many companies, as we are not too many years away from the time when the global economy will actually be truly “global,” encompassing every country and in which competitors will be emanating from everywhere.

2. Understand one’s own and others’ values and intentions. This speaks to having a core ability to know what you want to be and where you want to go at all times, even while being open to multiple ways to get there.

3. Seek clarity regarding yourself and seek sustainable relationships and solutions. Leading in turbulence demands the ability to utilize all facets of the human mind. Even the most impressive cognitive minds will fall short in the VUCA world — it will take equal parts of cognitive, social, emotional, spiritual, and physical intelligence to prevail.

4. Practice agility, adaptability and buoyancy. This means the responsive and resilient ability to balance adroitly and right yourself to ride out those turbulent forces that cannot be avoided, and to pivot quickly to seize advantage of those that can be harnessed.

5. Develop and engage social networks. The ability to recognize that the days of the single “great leader” are gone. In the VUCA world, the best leaders are the ones who harness leadership from everyone.

• 5 steps for a manager to adapt to leading in a VUCA world

1. First, and perhaps most important to becoming an adaptive leader for turbulent times, is to be able to let go of a lot of what defined success in prior roles and organizational models, essentially shedding the impact of years of performance reinforcement and standards and getting set to measure up to new ones.

2. Second, and related, is to have the ability to keep your ego in check—an enormously difficult challenge for a seasoned performer who had risen to higher heights only to shift backwards.

3. A third is the keen desire to keep learning, and the ability to see the new leadership and new organization as an escalator to on-boarding a whole new set of skills.

4. A fourth is to adopt an “open-to-everyone-in-the-organization” stance, indeed, even to those who initially were doubters or detractors as well as to new employees.

5. Finally, a fifth is the ability to work with the contradictions and paradoxes that increasingly come with navigating the VUCA world, rather than ralling against them. Indeed, many organizations are finding themselves living in the world of “both, and” instead of “either, or”. Those most affected by the VUCA world face them more frequently and more often, surrounded by uncertainty and ambiguity to boot.
• **Adaptive leadership tactics for operating in a VUCA world**

  • For Volatile Situations…
    - Communicate clearly
    - Ensure your intent is understood

  • For Uncertain Situations…
    - Get a fresh perspective
    - Be flexible

  • For Complex Situations…
    - Develop collaborative leaders
    - Stop seeking permanent solutions

  • For Ambiguous Situations…
    - Listen well
    - Think divergently
    - Set up incremental dividends

• **Countering VUCA: VUCA Prime (the “antidotes” to VUCA)**

  “We are moving from a world of **problems**, which demand speed, analysis, and elimination of uncertainty to solve, to a world of **dilemmas**, which demand patience, sense-making, and an engagement of uncertainty.”

  Countering VUCA requires:

  - **Vision** - an intent that seeks to create a future
  - **Understanding** - the ability to stop, look, and listen
  - **Clarity** - the ability to help make sense of the chaos
  - **Agility** - organizations where “wirearchy” is rewarded over hierarchy

  Leading with VUCA prime:

  **V** - In this leadership paradigm, **volatility is mitigated by** “vision,” a clear cut master statement of where an organization is headed. When confronted by volatility, leaders need to communicate clearly and make sure their intent is understood.

  **U** - **Uncertainty yields to** “understanding,” the deliberate ability to “stop, look, and listen.” In uncertain situations, leaders need to make sure they get fresh perspectives and remain flexible with regard to solutions.

  **C** - **Complexity is checkmated by** “clarity,” the deliberate effort to make “sense of the chaos.” In complex situations, leaders need to make sure to collaborate with others and stop seeking permanent solutions. To paraphrase an old adage, don’t let “perfect” become the enemy of “good enough.” For example be very clear about your strategy but be flexible on how to get there (within your values).
A - And **ambiguity is matched by “agility”**, the ability of a leader to communicate across people and organizations instantly and to move quickly in applying solutions. When confronted by ambiguity, leaders need to listen well, think divergently, and set up incremental dividends. This is captured in the concept of “wirearchy,” as opposed to “hierarchy” — where social networks that allow you to engage the insights of many trump the brilliance of any one person.

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