

## Success in a VUCA World

VUCA is a commonly used term in the business world today but its origins can be traced back to the US military. The term was developed in 1993 to develop an understanding of the New World Order following the end of the Cold War. In 1993, the world was definitely Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous. The tension of the struggle between Communism and Capitalism produced a level of certainty in the world which had, quite literally, evaporated overnight in Berlin in 1989.

Today's political and economic environment seems to be constantly in a state of disruption, from the rise of populism (evident in Brexit and Trump), political instability in domestic politics, the rising power of 'small' disruptors in traditional industry and the increasingly (and perhaps disproportionate) power of social media all converge to create a sense of unease and uncertainty.

That is, of course, if disruption challenges your status quo. But what if it didn't? What if you, as a business leader, could develop the skills to not only survive, but thrive in a VUCA world? This is the first in a series of articles that will introduce and explore four key concepts in VUCA Leadership to help you thrive where others may not.

Successful VUCA Leadership relies on four key concepts: Alignment, Mindset, Empowerment and Deep Teams.

### Alignment

An organisation that can act together has a common understanding of what is expected from everyone. This level of certainty can only come from a high level of alignment and integration between individual values, corporate values and strategy.

Strategic alignment demands that individuals, and especially lower level leaders and managers, buy in to the strategy; they need to continually reinforce the company's values and strategy on a daily basis. This daily demonstration of the organisation's values and strategy leads to high levels of predictability in the way that an organisation (and leader) will respond in any given situation, especially in uncertainty.

Critically, when challenged, our response to situations can resort to a default, a reflex. This reflex will be driven by our innate values; those we hold most deeply and often unconsciously. When these internal values are not aligned with the organisation's values and strategy, organisations fail to adapt and respond successfully.

Poor alignment between strategy and values leads to divergent and unacceptable behaviour. It sends mixed messages to the workforce, and leads to uncertainty. A lack of alignment risks amplifying, not reducing the VUCA forces at work in your organisation.

### Mindset

Carol Dweck's work on Mindset is widely appreciated to have a significant impact on individuals and organisations. The growth mindset has been linked to increased academic performance, overall levels of motivation and achievement, and most importantly in a VUCA environment, resilience.



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The resilience mindset in individuals can be manifest in an organisation's ability to become agile. An agile organisation is one which is constantly looking to improve their performance, looking for the next opportunity, and adapting to their environment.

The key to adapting to a VUCA world is understanding the importance of having a plan, and executing it, but also knowing when to adapt the plan. The Fixed mindset is one which focusses on a static view of success and failure; the Growth mindset recognises that success comes through learning and adaptation, which is the best way to succeed in a VUCA world.

## Empowerment

Empowerment can be a much over-used buzz word which in many ways has lost its original meaning. However, in a VUCA world, where a leader or manager may not be able to provide constant guidance or decision-making, empowerment is critical.

The agility inherent in a growth mindset is redundant unless leaders and teams are able to act. Empowerment of the team provides the outlet for this mindset.

Perhaps somewhat counter-intuitively, the origins of VUCA in the military are at the core of the concept of empowerment. As it became apparent that centralised command and control was not effective in a VUCA world, senior military leaders had to develop a way of providing guidance and empowering their junior leaders to make the decisions that had to be made on the ground.

More than simple delegation, the approach provides leaders and teams the "Freedom to Play" within the bounds of their leader's guidance, the organisation's values and the overall strategic plan.

## Deep Teams

Deep Teams are ones where leaders create new leaders; it is the manifestation of the adage "A Champion Team beats a Team of Champions". The Deep team concept calls on each member of the team to play their part; to know when to follow and when to lead; when to inject their ideas, and when to let others run with their ideas.

Developing Deep Teams requires organisations to invest in not only their leaders, but their teams too. The Deep Team concept identifies emerging leaders, encourages their growth and gives them the opportunity to learn to lead in safe ways. Vitally, the team development program must also teach leaders to be good followers, knowing when to take a back seat.

The Deep Team concept draws on John Maxwell's 5 Levels of Leadership which emphasises that the highest levels of leadership can only be attained when leaders generate new leaders.

Success in a VUCA world is challenging; it is in no ways a certainty, and it requires constant growth, and development. If you would like help achieving this for you and your organisation talk to us at Actruea about achieving True Growth for you and your teams.