

THE VUCA Model

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Ground Rules

- Balance your own participation
 - Say what needs to be said - take risk
 - Don't dominate
- Bring in others who aren't participating
- Monitor your non-verbal messages
- Maintain an attitude of respect
- Be present - pay attention and stay with the topic
- Take personal responsibility for the discussion

Session Objectives

- Introduce the VUCA model as a framework for understanding change
- Explore the role of communication in navigating change and aligning teams
- Practice strategies for communicating across levels
- Discuss tools to build clarity, reduce misunderstandings, and build influence



Why is Change Hard?

- Fear of the Unknown
- Loss of Control
- Comfort with the Status Quo
- Past Negative Experiences
- Increased Workload
- Lack of Clear Communication
- Emotional Reactions
- Change Fatigue

VUCA.

VUCA

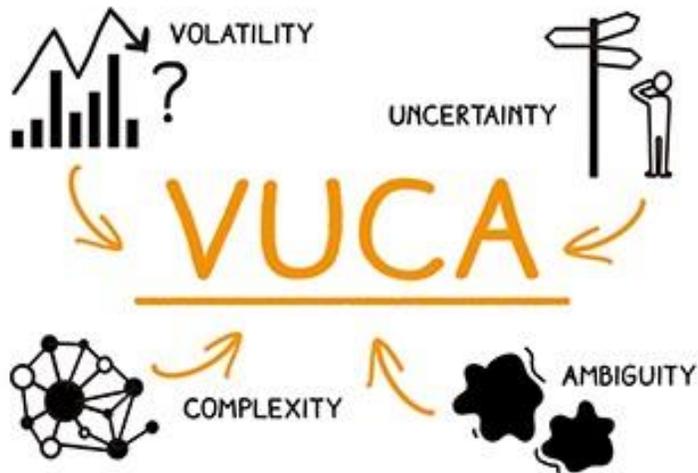
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V.U.C.A at work

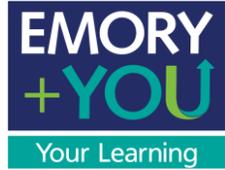
- ◆ **V = Volatility**
Things are changing fast, and we didn't see it coming.
Example: New policies drop suddenly, and we have to adjust everything on short notice.
- ◆ **U = Uncertainty**
We don't have all the answers, and we're not sure what's coming next.
Example: We know funding cuts are possible... but not how deep, or when.
- ◆ **C = Complexity**
There are lots of moving parts, and they all affect each other.
Example: A change in student enrollment affects staffing, budgets, and even housing.
- ◆ **A = Ambiguity**
Even with the facts, we're not sure what they mean or what to do.
Example: We get new data, but it's not clear how it connects to our programs.

Why VUCA?

VUCA stands for **V**olatility, **U**ncertainty, **C**omplexity, and **A**mbiguity



- Each element impacts both the organization and individuals during periods of change, and gives language to describe these situations
- It normalizes the stress of change
- It's a shared framework for problem-solving



Which element is it?

Volatility: *Things are changing fast, and we didn't see it coming.*

Uncertainty *We don't have all the answers, and we're not sure what's coming next.*

Complexity *There are lots of moving parts, and they all affect each other.*

Ambiguity *Even with the facts, we're not sure what they mean or what to do.*

A new EPIC update is being rolled out, but it requires coordination across IT, clinical partners, and multiple academic departments to implement.

The accreditation body just updated its requirements—*effective immediately*—your clinical supervision of trainees needs to majorly change before next month.

Patient numbers are fluctuating wildly; you're not sure how to staff your practice.

You receive a vague email from leadership about how they support research in the current environment, but no one can quite explain what the “support” will look like.

Complexity

Volatility

Uncertainty

Ambiguity

Name it to Tame It

- Groups will be given scenarios.
- For your scenario, decide:
 - Which VUCA element best describes it?
 - What's within your control to address right now?
 - What questions or actions could reduce the VUCA factor?

Educators: Rooms 1&2 – In the middle of the year, education leadership requires that all lectures convert to active learning.

Researchers: Rooms 3&4 – A new research portal is launched which will change how grants are routed, but the communications have been confusing and grant deadlines are looming.

Clinicians: Rooms 5-7 – A new clinical site opens, requiring coordination across three departments.

Appoint a scribe and a spokesperson!

Mapping VUCA

- Volatility- rapid and random fluctuations
 - Uncertainty-incomplete information about the future
 - Complexity-high, connected density and interactions
 - Ambiguity- many possible interpretations
- For Volatility → Stabilize what you can control
 - For Uncertainty → Gather data, ask clarifying questions
 - For Complexity → Break it into smaller parts or map the system
 - For Ambiguity → Reframe it with others; test small steps; clarify meaning

VUCA Mapping Activity

1. Think of a change that is happening now, and write it down.
2. Map it to one of the VUCA states.
3. Ask yourself “What’s one thing I can do to navigate this better, now that you know what’s actually going on?”

Example:

1. “Patient numbers are fluctuating wildly; I’m not sure how to staff my practice.”
2. “This is due to the *uncertainty* VUCA state because I don’t have all the information as to why this is happening.”
3. “Maybe I can reach out to others in my situation and find out what is causing the fluctuations for them. I could also read feedback forms, or ask my staff what they have observed and think—in general, gather more information.”

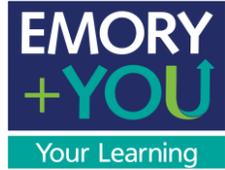
VUCA Mapping Activity

1. Discuss with your group. Ask them to help you come up with at least one strategy to move forward.

Example:

1. “Patient numbers are fluctuating wildly; I’m not sure how to staff my practice.”
2. “This is due to the *uncertainty* VUCA state because I don’t have all the information as to why this is happening.”
3. “Maybe I can reach out to others in my situation and find out what is causing the fluctuations for them. I could also read feedback forms, or ask my staff what they have observed and think—in general, gather more information.”

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Traits of a VUCA Change Leader

- Adaptable: Pivot quickly, embrace change, and experiment—learning as you go.
- Emotionally Attuned: Stay grounded, empathize with others, and recover from setbacks.
- Vision-Driven: Keep a clear sense of purpose and direction amid chaos.
- Decisive: Break complexity into manageable pieces and act with confidence, even without perfect data.
- Skilled Communicator: Share clarity, listen deeply, and foster a learning-focused culture.
- Systems Thinker: See interdependencies, embrace feedback loops, and continuously adapt.

Cultivating Traits for a VUCA World

- **Adaptable**
 - Regularly step outside your routine.
 - Practice making small decisions quickly to get comfortable acting without full certainty.
- **Emotionally Attuned**
 - Build a simple self-check habit (e.g., “What am I feeling and why?” before reacting).
 - Create your own “reset” strategy (short walk, take 3 breaths, debrief with a trusted peer).
- **Vision-Driven**
 - Block time each month to step back and reflect on long-term goals instead of only urgent tasks.
 - Reconnect your daily work to the broader mission and articulate it to others.

Cultivating Traits for a VUCA World

- **Decisive**
 - Break large problems into smaller, manageable chunks and tackle one at a time.
 - Practice making time-bound decisions (e.g., “I’ll decide this in 24 hours with the information I have”).
- **Skilled Communicator**
 - Ask clarifying questions before jumping to conclusions (“What I hear you saying is...”).
 - Intentionally share key messages in multiple ways (meetings + follow-up email + 1:1 discussion).
- **Systems Thinker**
 - Map out stakeholders and processes when starting something new—look at how each part affects the whole.
 - Treat new initiatives as “tests”—reflect on what worked, what didn’t, and adjust rather than aiming for perfect.

Questions?

Organizational Development
Feedback

