



## RETURN TO WORK: TIP OF THE MONTH

**Date: September 2021**

### **Another Perspective: VUCA 2.0**

You may be familiar with the acronym VUCA that the United States Army War College first used following the 9/11 terrorist attacks in 2001. Military planners were worried about the radically different and unfamiliar international security environment that had emerged, so they used VUCA to describe it. VUCA stands for:

- **Volatile** – change is rapid and unpredictable in its nature and extent.
- **Uncertain** – the present is unclear, and the future is uncertain.
- **Complex** – many different, interconnected factors come into play, with the potential to cause chaos and confusion.
- **Ambiguous** – there is a lack of clarity or awareness about situations.

VUCA certainly defines the environment in which we are working and living. However, examining what VUCA means implies that the situation is managing, overloading, and overwhelming you. We have a choice, though. We can make ourselves less vulnerable and become empowered to deal with uncontrollable and unpredictable forces.

Newer, more agile, and pragmatic processes are the key to managing in the VUCA world. Make vision, understanding, clarity, and agility your guiding principles to counteract the threats of VUCA, and turn them to your advantage. Adopt VUCA 2.0.

### VUCA



- Volatility
- Uncertainty
- Complexity
- Ambiguity

### VUCA 2.0



- Vision
- Understanding
- Clarity
- Agility

### **Counter Volatility with Vision**

1. Accept and embrace change as a constant, unpredictable feature of your working environment. Don't resist it.
2. Create a strong, compelling statement of team objectives and values, and develop a clear, shared vision of the future. Make sure that you set flexible goals that you can

amend when necessary. This allows you to navigate unsettled, unfamiliar situations and react quickly to changes.

### **Meet Uncertainty with Understanding**

1. Pause to listen and look around. This can help you understand and develop new ways of thinking and acting in response to VUCA's elements.
2. Make investing in, analyzing, and interpreting information a priority, so that you don't fall behind. Stay up to date with MC's announcements, updates, and policies, and listen carefully to students and colleagues to find out what is working and what needs to be improved.
3. Review and evaluate your performance. Consider what you did well, what came as a surprise, and what you could do differently next time.
4. Simulate and experiment with situations so that you can explore how they might play out and how you might react to them in the future. Aim to anticipate possible future threats and devise likely responses. Scenario planning and role-playing are valuable tools for generating foresight and preparing your responses.

### **React to Complexity with Clarity**

1. Communicate clearly with everyone. In complex situations, clearly expressed communications help them to understand your and your department's direction.
2. Develop teams and promote collaboration. VUCA situations are often too complicated for one person to handle. Build teams that can work effectively in a fast-paced, unpredictable environment.

### **Fight Ambiguity with Agility**

1. Promote flexibility, adaptability, and agility. Plan, building in contingency time, and be prepared to alter your plans as events unfold.
2. Increase your comfort with environments. Become collaborative, comfortable with ambiguity and change, and develop complex thinking skills.
3. Explore work outside of your usual functional areas to increase your knowledge and experience. Job rotation and cross-training can be excellent ways to improve agility.
4. Managers should lead their team members but don't dictate to or control them. Develop a collaborative environment and work hard to build consensus. Encourage debate, dissent, and participation from everyone.
5. Embrace an "ideas culture." Kevin Roberts, of advertising agency Saatchi and Saatchi, coined this alternative VUCA definition: "Vibrant, unreal, crazy, and astounding." This describes the kind of energetic culture that can give teams and organizations a creative, agile edge in uncertain times.
6. Acknowledge those who demonstrate vision, understanding, clarity, and agility. Let others see what kind of behavior is valued by highlighting innovations and calculated risk-taking moves.

From *Leaders Make the Future: Ten New Leadership Skills for an Uncertain World*, by Bob Johansen. First edition © 2009.