

Is Your VUCA External or Internal?

By Tom O'Shea, CMC Organizational Agility Practice Leader

Whew! The past seven months has been a pretty chaotic time in Washington and across the globe with almost more dramatic episodes of volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity (VUCA) than we can count. I am pretty sure that the Hollywood screenplay writers and reality TV show producers have more material than they can use for several seasons. If the potential consequences and implications of this global VUCA vortex were not so daunting with somewhat impetuous leaders in North Korea, Russia and beyond – one might imagine a surreal, Sci-Fi-tinged spy thriller coming to theaters in early 2018. Let's hope it does not continue to play out with that kind of drama.

VUCA is that term coined at the US Army War College in the late 1990's and is precisely descriptive of the global operating context. The reality is that there are “layers” of VUCA operating all the time. For example, the Global VUCA layer has its dynamics, consequences, influences and implications – so does your Regional and Local VUCA spheres. This is intrinsically part of the VUCA vortex and adds to the total complexity factor that leaders and organizations must encounter and navigate.



There is another very impactful dimension to the VUCA equation – your “INTERNAL” VUCA! As we work with clients around the world, we often see significant amounts of VUCA created INSIDE the organization that compounds and exasperates the EXTERNAL VUCA factors – creating a HYPER-VUCA condition ... CHAOS indeed. Sometimes these internal VUCA factors are deep-seeded in the organization's culture and can range from hard-riveted silos, steadfast holding onto “the way we have always done it” stubbornness, inadequate and often inaccurate information platforms or aberrant leadership behavior demeaning organizational spirit and values.

There are many sources of internal VUCA that often show up in THE VUCA REPORT™ pulse survey that we have been tracking for two years as well our ORGANIZATIONAL AGILITY PROFILE™. These are called out as people, process or technology obstacles that inhibit better and faster nimbleness and adaptability ... aka your agility. Some of these obstacles are chronic and have been around a long time. Others are newly sprouted as the speed of business accelerates and can cause spontaneous chaos for those who do not anticipate change well. We invite you to take THE VUCA REPORT™ survey yourself and share your experiences and perspectives along with the almost 1,000 others who have so far.

We are operating in a world filled with consequences and high performance expectations. The impact of time compression where daily expectations are for faster results and decisions combined with the reality that “the way we used to do it” is becoming obsolete at warp speed – conspire to freeze and paralyze those who are FRAGILE and sets the table for those who are AGILE. Darwin actually said its about “survival of the most adaptable”. You will

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Also posted at: <http://agilityconsulting.com/your-agility-advantage/internalvuca/>

find many tools and insights throughout our website to help you move from the fragile zone to the agile zone.

There are numerous examples of organizations becoming stymied by their own Internal VUCA. UBER is a recent example of a darling company with seemingly magic touch ... then spiraled into whirlpool of internal VUCA around leadership behavior. Certainly the high profile scandals at ENRON, WorldCom and Lehmann Brothers represented out of control internal VUCA. Unfortunately, there has been significant amounts of Internal VUCA impacting the effectiveness and agenda at the White House and Congress. Hopefully, the appointment of General Kelly this week will bring an experienced leader very familiar with all forms of VUCA along with the leadership acumen and discipline to minimize internal VUCA and help build better and faster capabilities to get important things accomplished. As in any organizations, internal VUCA distracts and undermines organizational performance.

As many of you begin your 2018 business planning cycles, it is an excellent time to examine and evaluate your forces of change and the VUCA impacting your success. What are those External VUCA factors that you must face and overcome? What are those INTERNAL VUCA factors that may be undermining and sapping your energy, resources and focus? Take a look at our ORGANIZATIONAL AGILITY PROFILE™ and work with your leadership team on these questions. I will be interested in how the conversation flow progresses. Always remember, as my partner Mike Richardson says ... the right conversation flow leads to cash flow!

Love to get your feedback and perspectives on your sources of INTERNAL VUCA and what you are doing.



Tom O'Shea, CMC

Organizational Agility Practice Leader

tom@agilityconsulting.com

336-282-1211

skype-osheatom

