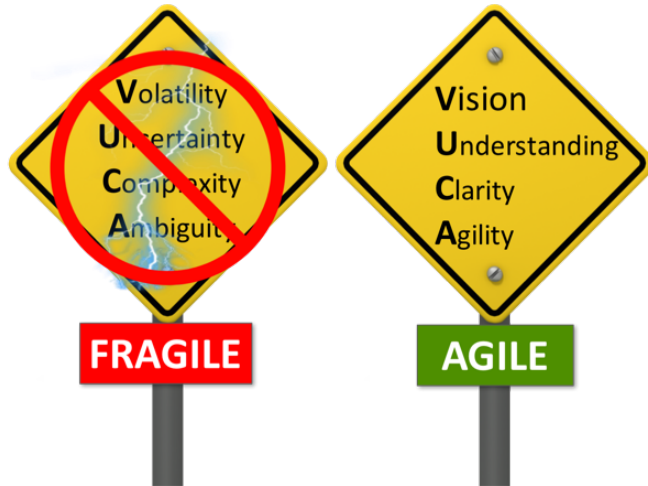# READY TO SHIFT YOUR VUCA TO VUCA PRIME?

By Tom O'Shea, CMC Organizational Agility Practice Leader

Whew! 2017 has certainly taken the VUCA WORLD to some new levels over the past few months. The stock markets have reached all time highs and yet the VUCA index may also be at an all time high as well. It is easy to point to many examples of the growing volatility (e.g. North Korea), uncertainty (e.g. Russian activities), complexity (e.g. future of healthcare) and ambiguity (e.g. finding one version of the truth).

What also seems to exacerbate all the dynamics in this turbulent world is the growing polarization and hardening of perspectives on so many fronts … this tends to make open discussion, trust, collaboration and cooperation harder than ever before. While these dynamics play out on the global stage … many of them are also confounding everyday organizational life as well since it is difficult to partition the tensions, fears and frustrations that exist in various segments of life.

A few years ago **Bob Johansen**, distinguished fellow at the *Institute for the Future*, developed an effective leadership framework as a "VUCA counterweight" he called **VUCA PRIME.** **Kirk Lawrence,** Executive Education Program Director at the UNC-CH Kenan-Flagler School of Business, does a good job of outlining the VUCA/VUCA Prime leadership corollaries in a white paper entitled LEADING IN A VUCA WORLD. Lawrence also extensively references a *People & Strategy Journal* article that ACT Partner **Nick Horney** and I wrote with **Bill Pasmore**, Columbia University Professor and SVP at the Center for Creative Leadership back in 2010 …"Leadership Agility: A Business Imperative for a VUCA World" that provides additional valuable insights.

Johansen's VUCA PRIME (VP) calls for leaders to focus on building *Vision, Understanding, Clarity and Agility* as the pathway to coping and overcoming the daunting and somewhat paralyzing impacts of the VUCA WORLD. I would go so far as even suggesting that VP represents the core of a real executive job description and key accountabilities. Johansen says, *Volatility can be countered with Vision* as leaders provide and reinforce the way forward and navigate the turbulence to achieve success. As any good skipper knows, you always strive to define your point of sail by compass setting or a fixed landmark to help guide helmsmen and crew … no

matter the conditions. Vision requires explicitness to answer the seminal three questions … Why are we here? How will we be successful? What are our success measures?

From Vision comes the opportunity to **transform** **Uncertainty to Understanding** bringing all team members into a shared mindset and understanding of how they can contribute to success along with the key operating principles that will promote active communication and widespread involvement practices. As with any transformation that aims to shape new individual and team behaviors, continual and consistent two-way communication is essential. It's not just talking at folks - it must involve active listening to gain as well as give understanding. Capturing the key elements of Vision to include core values, strategies and success measures into a broadly communicated and engaged **Strategy Map** that is alive, interactive and dynamic helps fuel continual understanding … it is not a once and done campaign.   It is a living, breathing and intrinsic way of leading and believing.

Complexity can be countered by Clarity that comes from building disciplines around the core basics, constantly reinforcing the real priorities and avoiding the cul de sacs of non-value added activities.   Dedication to being truly customer-centric and staying connected to giving and getting internal and external customer feedback can eradicate unnecessary complexity.   The VUCA world brings tremendous complexity everyday - so organizations must be mindful of not creating mountains of internal complexity and keep a shared commitment to simplicity. Clarity can come from re-examining and rebooting your meeting regimens and ownership (why does it exist and who responsible for its quality?). A major opportunity area to reduce complexity and increase clarity relates to your internal information and data integrity.   How many versions of the "truth" exist within your organization.   I have one client that recently concluded they needed to call for "**TRUTH SUMMIT**" … a collaborative workday with cross-functional "senators" tasked to define "one version of the truth" so all functions can work off the same set of assumptions. Sure would be useful in Washington these days.

Finally, **Ambiguity can be countered with Agility**! Changing the metronome of organizational cadence from a slow "schmaltzy" waltz to more of a riverdance-like jig *(like at my recent St. Pat's Party)* will help invigorate the energy to search and destroy the swamps of ambiguity that we often tolerate by creating a faster iteration cycle to sense and respond throughout the organization.   Here is where THE AGILE MODEL® kicks into bring a real roadmap for building agility.   Organizations that systematically examine, measure (e.g. using our AGILITY ANALYTICS) and then strengthen leadership and organizational behaviors using our development guides, coaching and interactive workshops find themselves in a position to make their AGILITY a competitive advantage in this increasing fast-paced VUCA WORLD. Agility with your leaders, teams and business units can be effectively measured and charted using visual heat-maps to clearly highlight and locate your gaps.

So, how are you doing in creating Vision, Understanding, Clarity and Agility in your organization? Take a look at some of the free self-assessments you can use for yourself and

your teams in the Agility Analytics link above. You will get an email copy of your results along with some links to some of our free articles based your responses. The one CERTAINTY we all can agree on is that our future world will continue to get faster, more turbulent, and much more VUCA! The question is … what are you prepared to do about it for yourself and your team?

Love to hear your thoughts.

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