

VUCA

Volatility. Uncertainty. Complexity. Ambiguity. On the surface, these words certainly speak to our current situation in the UK. In fact you might even be trying to remember a time when VUCA didn't apply.

VUCA - WHERE DOES IT COME FROM?

The VUCA concept has military origins, first introduced in the early 90s in the US to describe the situation after the Cold War. It took off in a business context after the 2008 global financial crisis and roughly translates into "it's absolutely crazy out there!"

It's all about the future – the various dimensions of 'uncontrollable' we find ourselves in and how we might best deal with it. And we think (maybe now more than ever) that it's pretty important to consider how we can support young people to successfully navigate a VUCA world.

VUCA ROUGHLY TRANSLATES INTO "IT'S ABSOLUTELY CRAZY OUT THERE!"

VUCA – WHAT DOES IT REALLY MEAN?

In practice, the four elements of VUCA are related, yet they present distinct elements that make our environment – world, life, work or study – harder to control.

Volatility is about speed of change. It is associated with fluctuations in demand, turbulence and short-time to markets. In short, high volatility means rapid change.

Uncertainty refers to the extent to which we can predict the future. Certainly, as a result of high volatility, it is becoming increasingly harder to predict forthcoming events and trends.

Complexity relates to the number of factors we must take into account, their variety and the relationship between them. The more factors, the greater their variety and the more they are interconnected, the more complex the environment becomes. This makes it harder to analyse and understand a given situation.

Ambiguity is the lack of clarity in interpreting something. It is vagueness in ideas and technology. Because of complexity and uncertainty, it is often difficult to discern what is contradictory or inaccurate.

ARE YOUNG PEOPLE FACING A VUCA WORLD?

In the Coronavirus world we're living in - this question seems like a no brainer. But remember there are other issues that will continue to face young people in the future. I'm sure you can all think of plenty, but here are just a few of the factors to take into account...

Society is undergoing far reaching changes and young people's social worlds are becoming increasingly complex.

Their career trajectories are increasingly volatile, mostly due to the introduction and advancement of technology.

And that's if they can secure employment in the first place. Lack of opportunities, low pay and getting work experience adds to the uncertainty and instability of their situation.

CAN WE HELP YOUNG PEOPLE SURVIVE, OR EVEN THRIVE IN A VUCA WORLD?

Well we're pretty sold on this one. This acronym reflects all of our current reality. So here are some fundamental skills we think will help our young people to negotiate their futures.

1. Develop CQ. That's your change quotient. We know the importance of IQ, DQ and EQ (digital and emotional intelligence), but it is becoming critically important to be able to deal with constant change, and not become overwhelmed. Having a structured approach and mental strategy for dealing with change and challenge, particularly that which is unexpected, will help with staying aboard the rollercoaster. CQ is pretty closely linked to a little characteristic we like to call resilience.

2. Plan, plan, and plan again. Amidst the murky waters of unpredictability, it's important to be able to focus on priorities and resources, and set goals to get there. We've advocated adaptability and flexibility through CQ, but by combining this with the ability to plan, we think young people will be more able to reach their personal ambitions – regardless of what the VUCA world has in store for them. Developing planning, adapting and goal-setting skills is closely linked to self-regulation abilities – which refers to the control of emotion and behaviours, and is another key factor in resilience.

3. Focus on soft skills. Have soft skills ever been more important? Right now as they navigate social isolation, are forced to adapt to sudden and immediate change and attempt to manage unknown timescales. The world we're living in is changing rapidly, but having strong communication and team-work skills, a positive work ethic and focused mindset will never go out of fashion.

The volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity we're living in presents a genuine challenge for young people. To help them deal with these challenges, we think it's essential that young people are supported in the development of key soft skills – to help them be adaptable, focused, and collaborative in this VUCA world.

<https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/managing-vuca-world.htm>