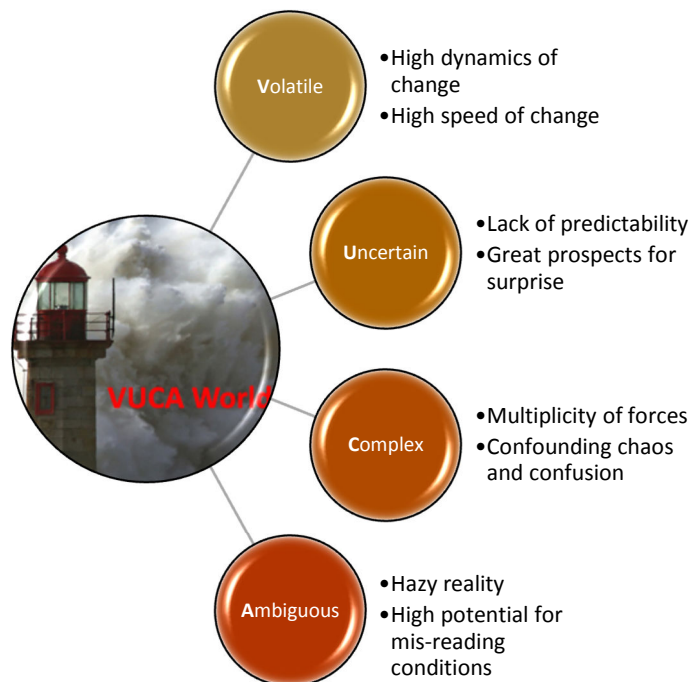


Goal Setting in a VUCA World

- Rukmini Iyer, Director, Exult! Solutions

April is goal setting time for most Indian corporations. As professionals mull over what targets to commit to for the next one year, and perhaps even ponder over their investment and personal finance commitments, it is important to align with the environment first.

While the business environment always tends to be dynamic, in the last few years, it has become increasingly VUCA. While 'VUCA World' has been a trendy acronym for a while now, here's a quick reference for those who have not come across the term yet:



Given these times, goal setting can no longer follow the traditional annual process. Reviews and recalibrations will be far more frequent. Let us address goal setting in the VUCA World from two perspectives – that of you, the individual and that of your organization.

Individual Goal Setting

Roger Martin said, in his 2013 HBR blog: “Don’t let strategy become planning.” This is the crux of goal setting in the current times. Here are a few things that can help us adapt:

Outline aspirations: By all means, have long term aspirations and clarify those for yourself. Whether it is about becoming the head of your business unit or buying a dream home, acknowledge your goals and let them motivate you.



Identify tasks: Break down your goals into smaller objectives and identify the tasks that could help to finish those objectives. However, plan for tasks only for the short term. In the VUCA World, we often do not know what the next three months bring. Therefore, even as there is a strategy, let your plans take cognizance of the changing reality and adapt. Do not waste time planning every detail about your goal; only identify tasks that are fairly immediate. The long term tasks will take shape as the times change.

Stay present and listen: Presence is about being tuned in – read what is happening in your industry, use analytics to your advantage and keep track of your performance, listen to what is buzzing in the office and the world, acknowledge your gut feelings about what is to come and most importantly, connect these dots.

Collaborate: Competition belonged in the past. Whatever your goals are, learn to collaborate. Owing to high interconnectedness of things, interdependency is high in the business as well as personal environment and this can be used to propel us forward. The sales function can deliver only if operations does well, one salesman can sell better if another colleague has built a good brand image of the product in the market, and so on. We can capitalise on each other's capabilities well if we are open to collaborating.

Organizational Goal Setting

In a 2014 article, Canadian leadership consultant Brian Brittain said “Making business or organizational progress in a VUCA world requires travel by sail, rather than rail.” He used a very apt analogy to explain that laying out a linear track towards a destination will no longer work for organizations. Companies need to establish a general horizon and sail towards it, while dealing with the unpredictable winds and waves as they come. Here's what organizations can do to deal with the times:

Move from vision to presence: About three decades ago, visioning was in vogue. A lot of organizations formed long term visions and worked 'from' it, given that the business environment was fairly predictable. Now, we can only work 'into' a long term vision, not 'from' it, given that market realities change very rapidly. Organizational leaders need to stay tuned in to overt and subtle aspects of all areas of business – people, processes, products, price and market – and act very quickly to capitalise on opportunities, regardless of whether these were anticipated or not.

Use individual capabilities: While job descriptions and KPIs will continue to be present for operational efficiency, organizations need to acknowledge that individuals have far more options beyond employment now. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge individual capabilities and aspirations and give them opportunities to perform, sometimes beyond their defined roles, if they demonstrate interest and competence.

Practice consilience: Consilience is the order of the day. Departments and divisions cannot afford to operate in silos. Engagement with each other is key to a concerted effort at delivering your product or service. Therefore, review your organizational design and make sure that the structures and processes allow for high engagement and collaboration.



Stay open to transformation: Change management is passé. In most cases, decisions will be quick and intuitive, while taking cognizance of data derived through constant analytics. Do not expect too much time for planning and review. Identify the right leaders and empower them to execute quick decisions that may sometimes challenge traditional ways of working.

The VUCA times are challenging, but present us with a huge opportunity to shed traditional ways and adopt truly contemporary practices, which of course, are also subject to transformation. There is great scope for personal and organizational growth, that can lead to a stronger, sustainable future, if we collectively stay present and true to the times.

(Exult! Solutions offers consulting services in organizational transformation, training, coaching and conflict resolution. Reach us at info@exult-solutions.com or on +91-9819074099. Visit our website www.exult-solutions.com to know more.)

