

# VUCA World: Can this acronym help us now?

**V**olatility. 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 right now we think it's more important than ever to consider how we can support young people to successfully navigate a VUCA world.

## VUCA – What does it really mean?

The four elements of VUCA are related, but 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. With high volatility, it's much harder to predict 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, variety and interconnections, the more complex the environment becomes and the harder it is 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?

COVID-19 has made this question seem like a no brainer. But there were and are other issues that will continue to face young people in the future...

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?

At Outward Bound, we're pretty sold on this one. Here are some fundamental skills we think will help young people to negotiate their futures.

1. Develop CQ. That's your change quotient. It is becoming critically important to be able to deal with constant change, and not be overwhelmed. Having a structured approach and mental strategy for dealing with unexpected change and challenge will help young people navigate this rollercoaster. CQ is 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 set goals to get there. We advocated adaptability and flexibility through CQ, but combining this with the ability to plan will better help young people to reach their personal ambitions. 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 than in this aftermath of social isolation, forced adaptation to sudden and immediate change and managing unknown timescales? Our world changes 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.



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