

## WHAT CRITICAL QUALITIES DO LEADERS NEED IN THIS VUCA WORLD?

COVID-19 definitely meets the definition of a VUCA environment; **V**olatile, **U**ncertain, **C**omplex, **A**mbiguous.

How does the VUCA leadership model (developed originally by the US Army in response to the Gulf War) offer insights on what we need to draw on as people and as leaders in this current crisis?

In responding to this external environment, Bob Johanson, a fellow at the Institute for the Future, developed an antidote, called VUCA Prime, which suggested that leaders require the following qualities to respond to VUCA threats; **V**ision, **U**nderstanding, **C**larity and **A**gility.

Our experience of supporting leaders in this current VUCA world, suggests that there is a different set of VUCA qualities that are more critical for leaders right now. **Values, Us, Care, Adaptability.**

### Values: What is important to us in our life and our work?

Holding on to and **talking openly about the set of values which are our 'rock' and ground us can be a source of comfort and re-assurance** for ourselves and for our teams.

As leaders, this gives us a clear focus on what is important. Asking ourselves 'why we do what we do?' is, as Sinek acknowledges, a question that can help leaders create conditions whereby staff are aligned with the organisation's objectives and are motivated to work towards current and future success.

Currently, it is easy to become distracted and diverted from the big picture and go down unhelpful rabbit holes chasing unrealistic outcomes which are not consistent with our own values. Keeping focused on the 'why' can provide focus and keep people grounded.

### Us: Who is my us?

A sense of belonging and mutual support provides emotional glue – and is vitally important right now.

Right now, who or what we are connected to may feel different. **What support we need, and who we need to give support to, might also be different.**

Leaders need to find ways of connecting people to ensure everyone's 'voice' is heard and that vital links are made. For example - staff feeling more of the pain from the current situation (by being overwhelmed with work or by being furloughed), those bringing in key intelligence from stakeholders that will provide helpful and critical direction, and those who feel less directly affected currently.

You may need to make sure that certain voices are allowed to rise above others, regardless of status or role. For Snowden and Boone, this is about opening up the discussions. The current complex context requires more interactive communication than at any other time. As a leader, how do you create or recreate 'us'?

How do you foster the right different connections between teams and groups of people?

## Care: How are you taking care of yourself and others?

Letting go of perceived pressure to react in the right way and do the right thing will be key here - there are no right or wrong answers. The 'be kind' emphasis is helpful, and being kind to yourself must be the starting point.

**More than ever, Covey's idea of creating a positive Emotional Bank Balance with colleagues is needed.**

Paying attention to what is going on in our colleagues' lives and sharing our own insights and stories will be an investment in building a strong Emotional Bank account. For leaders who have invested, making a withdrawal on this account when significant changes and buy in are required as the situation develops be crucial.

It can be easy to overlook the need to continue to invest in relationships right now, and how we show that we care as leaders will look different for different people and situations.

For some, it might be through providing them much greater autonomy to get on and do their job without close oversight and management. For others, it may be through extra support measures and access to resources.

Demonstrating that you understand that different people need different things from you as a leader, and that you can 'tailor' your approach to what they need is a critical quality.

## Adaptability: Do you give people permission to fail fast and learn fast?

Dweck in her work on Growth Mindset, talks about the importance of failure as a route to success, believing that the word FAIL equals - First Attempt in Learning.

However, that also means being comfortable with making mistakes along the way and avoiding any kind of blame culture. The best leaders in this situation will **be those who admit they don't know everything, admit their own mistakes and encourage mistakes in others.**

Encouraging technological and cultural innovation is needed, as is an environment of ongoing learning and sharing of learning. Focusing on the learning gained from how we adapted and reacted to these situations will be key to how we emerge from this.

What have I learned about myself, my team and my stakeholders that will make me a better leader?

## SUPPORTING EACH OTHER THROUGH THE COVID-19 CRISIS

So we may feel like we are in a battle, a war, and a fight to the end. But one thing is clear – we are not alone. Leaders across the world are being challenged to demonstrate these VUCA qualities (Values, Us, Care, Adaptability).

What do you need to do to show up for yourself and your team with these qualities?

***Find out how the Social Enterprise Academy's online learning programmes and sessions can support you and your team through this crisis on our COVID-19 support page.***