



Making sense of complexity and chaos

What's VUCA and why do we need to make sense of complexity and chaos?

Nowadays, it seems like everywhere you turn people are saying 'VUCA this' and 'VUCA that,' so it's very much a concept currently out there in the world at large. In our white paper of April 2017 we wondered if this would be a bandwagon. However, volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity – these four words comprise an acronym first introduced by the US Army in 1987 and perfectly captures the world we presently live in.

Weekly, organisations around the globe are failing, in many instances because they are struggling to see and anticipate the changes ahead. The speed of technology, volume and democratisation of data are just some of the trends accelerating the complexity and volatility around us. What may seem obvious in retrospect often isn't to the individuals and organisations at the time, when decisions matter. As the pace of change outstrips our capacity to keep up, people feel they are running ever faster just to try and keep up. The conventional view of the 'expert knowledge worker' knowing everything is outdated and no longer fit for purpose, we need to turn our attention towards understanding and developing how leaders' make sense of their worlds and their capacities to deal with the challenges these VUCA conditions bring.

In a special episode of 'Out of the Comfort Zone' with Wanda Wallace, MDV Consulting's Managing Partner, Mike Vessey, deconstructs what this VUCA world means for leaders today. He offers a message of hope that drawing upon concepts of adult development, there are in fact developmental tools and practices that can help leaders grow their capacities in how they make sense of their world and the situations around them. It is not talking about new 'know how' or being smarter – these capacities are about the way a person thinks about a situation, how she or he relates to others and the way they relate to themselves. Developing these underlying capacities, equips them to navigate complex and uncertain situations more successfully.

You can listen to the full podcast here:

<https://www.voiceamerica.com/episode/121601/making-sense-of-complexity-and-chaos-with-mike-vessey>.



Making Sense Of Complexity And Chaos With Mike Vessey

How can we address these challenges?

In today's world, where the cause and effect of an issue may be unknown or there's disagreement about what is the cause and effect, a leader can no longer just rely on their expertise and past experience to know the answer or where to turn, because it may just be unknowable. The primary concern here is understanding and developing the individual's sense - or meaning-making system which they use to interpret and navigate the complex issue they are facing. This facet of a person – their 'operating system' you might say - is so hidden that it's rarely talked about, and sometimes the individual isn't even aware of these internal aspects. So it is imperative to evaluate a person's 'operating system' essentially open them up and start to help them develop it, shifting their meaning making into an elevated position – 'upgrading it accordingly' instead of seeing it as a fixed thing, in the way that perhaps historically personality or traits showed up.

Proven ways to grow developmental capacities

That is the best part about this whole process; unlike fixed measures that provide a snapshot and leave the individual to it, this focus on developmental capacities emphasises an exponential potential for growth and adaptation. The key is creating the right conditions and breaking habits that are detrimental, replacing them with new helpful habits which allow the individual over time, to unconsciously and appropriately respond in new ways when VUCA strikes.

Mike describes one of the simplest tools available to think about and analyse situations around us, called the Cynefin framework. Developed by David Snowden, MDV often uses this with leaders because of its efficacy. Essentially it helps a person look at the relationship between cause and effect within a situation to help determine appropriate responses. Click here for a visual summary of this framework:

<https://mdvconsulting.co/experience/resources/>

Often in corporate life, results are needed quickly or there's just too much at stake to experiment. Complexity is not liked and the natural tendency is to look for simplistic solutions that can invariably make the situation worse. Complex problems, however, require a different way of navigating - setting up some experiments and suspending judgement until a better handle is gained on what is going on.

Other practices such as systems thinking, navigating polarities, perspective shifting and Bob Keegan's 'Immunity to Change' were discussed by Mike as among the many approaches utilised by MDV professionals to help leaders shift their habits and develop their capacities in how they think about, relate to others and to themselves.

Find out more:

You can read more about MDV's approach to adult development (otherwise known as 'vertical') and the approaches helping leaders meet the demands of this VUCA world here:

<https://mdvconsulting.co/whitepaper/what-in-the-world-is-going-on-mapping-vertical-and-vuca-beyond-the-bandwagon/>.

To discuss ways to introduce and benefit from these approaches contact us at

<https://mdvconsulting.co/contact-us/>

Post script

Mike noticed with a degree of irony that in recording the radio show with Wanda, he spoke with certainty that the show would broadcast as planned on 31st January 2020 and made reference to events that were to happen that day. When the show was moved to a broadcast two weeks later, there was a 'Duh!' moment.

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