

Journey to the Uncertainty of the Earth: A Narrative of Teacher's Experience During COVID-19 Pandemic

Jonathan P. Cruz

Department of Education (DepEd) – Philippines
SDO Bulacan Province, Region III, Philippines
jonathan.cruz001@deped.gov.ph

Abstract: This paper presents a narrative of a junior high school teacher during the unique and challenging life in the middle of the COVID-19 Pandemic. The presentation of the author's experiences was anchored on the VUCA (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, Ambiguity) Model which was adopted by strategic business leaders to describe the chaotic, turbulent, and rapidly changing business environment that has become the "new normal". The author hopes to inspire colleagues and individuals outside the teaching profession from the personal insights and experiences enumerated in this text.

Keywords — VUCA; Volatility; Uncertainty; Complexity; Ambiguity; Teacher's Experience; COVID-19 Pandemic

1. INTRODUCTION

Who says that the phrase *New Normal* is new? Of course not! Long before this COVID-19 pandemic, these words have circulated the globe and have been used for various events of significant values.

A Nigerian government executive Asonye (2020) comprehensively defined *new normal* as a state to which an economy, society, and the like settle following a crisis, when this differs from the situation that prevailed before the start of the crisis. According to the executive, the term has been employed for years concerning World War I, the financial crisis of 2007-2008, the September 11 attacks, the aftermath of the 2008–2012 global recession, the COVID-19 pandemic, and other events. In the field of business and entrepreneurship, the new normal is born by the *volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity* (VUCA) inherent in today's business world it is profoundly changing not only how organizations do business, but how business leaders lead (Lawrence, 2013).

The skills and abilities leaders once needed to help their organizations thrive are no longer sufficient. Today, more strategic, complex critical-thinking skills are required of business leaders. HR and talent management professionals can help their organizations succeed in today's VUCA environment by developing leaders who can counter volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity with vision, understanding, clarity, and agility (Lawrence, 2013).

As a popular acronym, VUCA was first used in 1987 grounded on the leadership theories of Warren Bennis and Burt Nanus to describe or to reflect on the volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity of general conditions and situations (US Army Heritage and Education Center, 2018; Benis & Nanus, 1985). Now that we are here in the generation fighting for our lives against the COVID-19 pandemic, let us look back once again on the challenges of VUCA in the education sector and gets inspired

with its new version for establishing a positive world from the workplace to home and community, and vice versa.

What is VUCA (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, Ambiguity)?



Fig. 1. The Acronym VUCA (Courtesy of <https://www.ckju.net>)

The original VUCA model metamorphosized to meet the emerging needs of the industry and various sectors of society. With this premise, the VUCA Prime, a continuum of skills that leaders can develop, came into being, coining new terms to personifies VUCA from its original sense, thus, the other sides of the model as characteristics of an effective leader in a VUCA world, and these are vision, understanding, clarity, and agility (Lawrence, 2013; Johansen, 2012).

Lawrence (2013) enumerated the notable premises of the VUCA Prime from the work of Johansen (2012). The volatility of the environment can be countered with vision because vision is even more vital in turbulent times. The existing uncertainty can be countered with understanding, the ability of a leader to stop, look, and listen. The presence of complexity can be countered with clarity, the deliberative process to make sense of the chaos. The existing ambiguity can be countered with agility, the ability to communicate across the

organization, and to move quickly to apply solutions. With all these new terms, VUCA leaders are challenged to have the foresight to see where they are going but must also remain flexible about how they get there (Apollo Research Institute staff, 2012).

Amidst this COVID-19 pandemic, the education of our schoolchildren must continue. We are now in a situation when we needed most of the education leaders who can make both ends meet. Our education system, just like all other facets of society, is now under the VUCA world, and therefore we need VUCA leaders more than ever.



Fig. 2. The Two Sides of VUCA

2. A VOLATILE ENVIRONMENT NEEDS A VISION

The Merriam-Webster (2021) dictionary defines *volatile* as an adjective *characterized by or subject to rapid or unexpected change*. Therefore, volatility means the nature, speed, volume, and magnitude of change that is not in a predictable pattern (Sullivan, 2012). Lawrence (2013) defined it similarly, stating that it is turbulence, a phenomenon that is occurring more frequently than in the past.

Volatility can be countered by Vision. Setting a clear direction for the school will establish a focus on what the institution aspires to its stakeholders. Our schools need leadership that can address the gaps of the current situation. We need school leaders who are competent enough in terms of their professional competencies because these are indications of effective management of the school system (Cabigao, 2019).

3. AN UNCERTAIN SITUATION NEEDS UNDERSTANDING

The word *uncertain* is defined by Merriam-Webster (2021) dictionary as *not clearly identified or defined*. From it, we can say that uncertainty is the lack of predictability in issues and events (Kinsinger & Walch, 2012).

Uncertainty can be countered by Understanding. Having school leaders who can stop, look, and listen in every situation establishes a friendly and comforting environment in the academe. Knowing well both sides of the coin will help school executives gauge the real scores behind each challenge under his administration, thus increasing the commitment level of the people in the organization. In a local study conducted by Cabigao (2016), a notable finding stated that teachers' organizational commitment has a correlation to some extent on instructional competence. The said study affirmed the premise of Celep (2000) which stated that the teachers' interaction with each other in the workplace, the communication between the teachers and the learners, the quality of procedures, and the level of the teachers' apprehension of their actual profession all affect the teachers' level of organizational commitment.

4. A COMPLEX WORLD NEEDS CLARITY

The Merriam-Webster (2021) dictionary defines *complex* as *a whole made up of complicated or interrelated parts*. Sullivan (2012) noted that complexity is brought by often numerous and difficult-to-understand causes and mitigating factors, both inside and outside the organization, involved in a problem.

Complexity can be countered by Clarity. Chaos could be avoided by setting a clear focus on what to do. In an article by Cabigao (2020) entitled *Being Seen The Unseen*, he says that "Looks are deceiving sometimes. People are easily enticed by what our eyes see when we get along with others." School leaders must always dig up to know the real score of each situation and unearth all the learnings from each incident. Being careful and objective on how we look at each situation will enrich and guide our decisions for a better version of it.

5. AN AMBIGUOUS COMMUNITY NEEDS AGILITY

Ambiguous is defined by Merriam-Webster (2021) dictionary as *doubtful or uncertain especially from obscurity or indistinctness*. Considering this, ambiguity is defined as the lack of clarity about the meaning of an event (Caron, 2009), or the causes and the 'who, what, where, how, and why' behind the things that are happening [that] are unclear and hard to ascertain (Sullivan, 2012).

Ambiguity can be countered by Agility. Communication between and among people in the organization is an indispensable factor of effective leadership. School administrators shall communicate well its advocacies and goals to their teachers, and the teachers shall likewise do the same to their respective learners. School, home, and

community shall have unified thoughts on how to continuously improve the school system. The learners' performance can be improved through strengthened school-home partnerships (Cabigao, 2014), so does with the general performance of the school through the active participation of internal and external stakeholders.

6. GENERALIZATION FROM AN EDUCATOR

The concepts of VUCA are very timely for our school leaders during this pandemic period. Aside from the established professional standards expected to be performed by school heads in the performance of their duties and responsibilities as education leaders, their thoughts and actions can be the better gauge by having clear goals and expectations (Cabigao, 2021). Schools, under the effective leadership of their managers, must always set the bar high, as they are all empowered to locally address the gaps in the implementation of various educational programs and projects based on the diverse needs of its learners and other stakeholders. This premise is captured in the article entitled *Building An Image of Excellence* (Cabigao, 2020) suggesting ways on how to build up a rapport with various stakeholders for the success of the school. Learning from the lessons of the old and new VUCA, we can expect a continuous improvement of practice in the school setting, learning from the related experiences of the business world. After all, everything on earth is interrelated in such a small world. A never-ending journey is expected among education leaders by looking and sharing the best within our organizations. As my former school principal stated in his article, "Everyone must witness such worth-replicating school projects for personal and professional learning and satisfaction" (Cabigao, 2018).

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