Managing Leadership Talent in a VUCA World

Learn how SHL’s Mobilize optimizes the fit between leaders and their context to produce better performance and tangible business results in a VUCA world.

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The world is continuously evolving, and the recent unprecedented situation has had a big impact on the organizations globally. To cope with the unpredictable times, organizations need to start adopting new practices and adapt to the changes. According to a study by Deloitte, which uncovered the main leadership requirements of the 21st century, 81% of the respondents agreed that the ability to lead in a more complex and ambiguous environment is the most crucial. But what does this translate to leaders? What different practices should leaders adopt in a world that is best described as ‘VUCA’?

What is a VUCA world?

VUCA is very relevant for the world of work today, but it is not a very new concept. The ‘VUCA’ concept originated in the US military in the late 1990s describes an environment characterized by: Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity and Ambiguity. It was an acknowledgment that the ‘certainties’ of cold war world were over, and that new and unpredictable challenges are inevitable.

VUCA became relevant in the business community when leaders began to manage through the challenges of geopolitical disruption, global supply chain logistics, the emergence of internet commerce and the threat associated with cyber-warfare. This has entered organizational thinking as a description of a world that presents new challenges, new threats, and new opportunities.
Well-known visionary and author, Bob Johansen writes in his book, *Leaders Make the Future: Ten New Leadership Skills for an Uncertain World*, leaders will increasingly face challenges that have no solutions. Of course, they will have to make decisions anyway.

## Leading in a VUCA World

Leading successfully in a VUCA world requires leaders to have specific attributes and is also dependent on the work environment or context under which leaders perform. *The context is critical* as different leadership attributes are relevant to performance in different contexts e.g., attributes required for managing a team in the Covid era, i.e., in a virtual context is different from the pre-covid scenario.

In a world where organizations require constant re-direction and agility to be prepared for future challenges, a question we often ask our clients is ‘who amongst the current employees has leadership attributes to be successful for imminent business challenges’.


Context moderates the relationship between performance and experience. This means someone who is not a natural fit for a given context could still be successful by gaining relevant experience. Of course, the greatest likelihood of success comes when a leader’s attributes and experience match well with the context in which performance is measured. In the uncertain and ambiguous world, how we enable organizations to identify leaders fit for future business contexts is a constant dilemma for HR Professionals.

75% of senior leaders say that their business units do not have future-ready leaders in place” – SHL (2021). *The Evolution of Leadership Science.*
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How Context Helps to Accurately Predict Leader’s Fit

SHL has identified which natural attributes can hinder or help in 27 different contexts. **Contextual insights** are most impactful when understanding if a leader has the attributes and experience to perform effectively in specific contexts. Adding context ensures a more accurate prediction of leader success as it considers how the interplay of behaviors impact leader performance in a real-life organizational context. In essence, we can increase the prediction of leader success significantly by looking at individual attributes and the fit to the relevant context.

Aligning leadership characteristics relevant in VUCA world to the organizational challenges helps to optimize where to place leaders by better matching their attributes and experiences to the ultimate context, they will face in the role. As leadership succession planning is a comprehensive ongoing process, a visual representation of the talent pool along with mapping of attributes to context helps to engage with various stakeholders in a holistic manner. With easy to observe Talent insights on Mobilize, organizations can deploy targeted and dynamic leadership development strategies.

SHL has developed a solution to improve the impact of succession planning initiatives and building stronger and diverse leadership pipelines by addressing the complexities of the current VUCA world. This way it is helping organizations to unlock the potential of employees and identify best fit talent against most the predictive future context.

Through applied research, SHL has created an engaging platform called **Mobilize**, which captures workforce data and visualizes the insights to answer succession planning and leadership development questions. It is
scalable and provides easy-to-implement leadership insight that is available across the organization whenever and wherever you need it.

SHL’s Mobilize provides a flexible and user-friendly experience which is data-driven to increase returns on leadership investments. By engaging assessment with applied science, mobilize increases the accuracy and speed of leadership mobility decisions. Once leaders are in a role, a context-driven strategy will improve their development by ensuring they get the development experiences they need to navigate business complexities.

**Mobilize is scalable and provides easy to implement leadership insight that is available across the organization whenever and wherever you need it.**

Whether your organization is seeking to navigate the VUCA world by leading change, driving performance, driving a culture change, or managing risks, a contextual approach to leadership placement can optimize your chances of success.

**Check out our Mobilize solution, so we can help you select high potential talent that are prepared to lead in the VUCA world.**