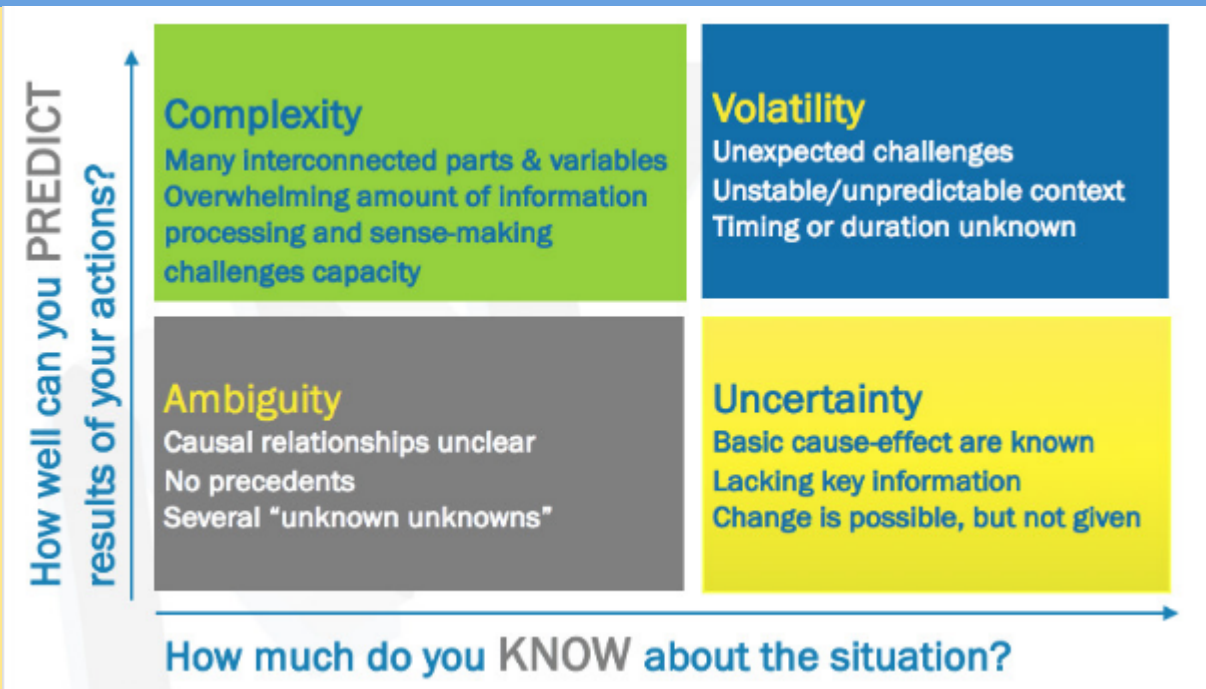


# LEADING THROUGH CHALLENGING TIMES

Now more than ever leaders are faced with new challenges on how to lead. A helpful model to consider is V.U.C.A. This quick guide takes you through options to overcome this

## VOLATILITY, UNCERTAINTY, COMPLEXITY, AMBIGUITY

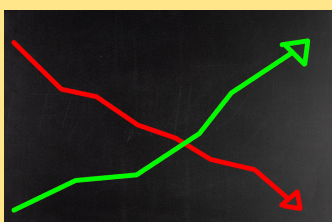


When things are changing rapidly, there is no time to run every challenge or opportunity up through the chain of command to get clarity or confirmation.

Leaders need to become more agile and flexible. Supporting their teams to do the same. "An agile leader is anyone who spots a challenge or opportunity and effectively responds".

To achieve this leadership needs to move from the command and control to one focused on communication, collaboration and coordination.

Leadership is not designated by your job title but by attitude and behaviour. In VUCA environments, everyone has a level of leadership. Everyone must be empowered to act to serve the team, our patients and our community



### VOLATILITY

Characterized by an unpredictable, unstable situation, though not necessarily complicated. Information is available as events unfold

- **Improve decision-speed**  
 Time is of the essence reduce chain of command decision making by clarifying decision making powers (both for you and your team)
- **Promote an attitude of flexibility in your team.**  
 Yesterdays decisions may quickly change today. Build tolerance and acceptance to this.
- **Tap your hi-potential talent for temporary assignments**  
 Jobs in the team or elsewhere in the organisation may need reassignment of tasks and roles. Who in the team will respond best to this. Who has been eager for new challenges to use their talents.

- **Make 'good and safe enough' choices**

You and your team may have to make decisions on limited data and make less than perfect choices. What does 'good enough' look like?

- **Seek sources of information that could reduce uncertainty**

Ensure you start each shift with checking on latest updates. Seek those who are most likely to have up to date information or analysis and who have good levels of understanding

- **Identify the givens of the current situation and focus on what is within your span of control**

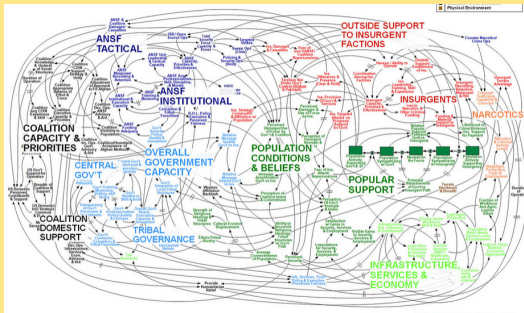
Use sphere's of control to look at what you can control and influence and leave the rest. Anxiety and stress may be building due to uncertainty. Promote open discussion about this



### UNCERTAINTY

Characterized by a lack of key actionable information, such as timing, duration, cause and effect

# LEADING THROUGH CHALLENGING TIMES



**COMPLEXITY**  
Characterized by an overwhelming amount of information, interconnected or moving parts and relationships

- **Improve communication, collaboration and coordination**

Regularly connect with others to create the picture and check understanding.

- **Reduce and distill information**

Consider how to reduce your own information overload and that of your team. What is 'enough' knowledge/data. Can you summarise or use images to convey complex messages and systems.

- **Use Quality Improvement methods to navigate and reduce complexity**

Use Sherwood 6 steps (QI) process to assess how to make things simpler and find short cuts. Develop understandable SOPs

- **Create (some) clarity -**

What IS known? Discuss the discomfort of not having enough data to make perfect decisions. What does sufficient information look like.

- **Make space for interactions to re-engage and recommit to your purpose**

Be honest and open about lacking information. Others may think people know more than they do and are withholding it. Creating mistrust. Share what you do know

- **Make time to learn the lessons from experience and carry them forward**

Ambiguity is the best time to pilot ideas that will help give you and the team more information. Engage your team innovators who are good at experimenting.



## AMBIGUITY

Characterized by a lack of information and precedent, making the ability to predict the impact of actions a challenge

### What does an Antidote to VUCA look like?

**'Vision'**, leaders at all levels need to communicate clearly where we are headed and how that will benefit our colleagues and patients – whilst staying open and flexible as to how we might get there.

**'Understanding'** is about making a conscious effort to 'stop, look and listen' to a wide variety of sources and perspectives. Having a full and detailed picture of what is going on will help you make an informed decision as to when to persevere, tweak or change direction completely.

**'Clarity'** in today's complex NHS this is a challenge as there will never be full up to date clarity. Better to spend time get used to, comfortable with a level of ambiguity – (ie what do we have to know right now). Keep in mind the ultimate goal rather than the detail on how to get there.

**'Agile'** working with using these identified 9 behaviours that make up learning agility and will help you as an individual thrive in a VUCA environment:

1. Flexibility – willingness to try new things
2. Speed – rapidly grasping new ideas
3. Experimenting – testing out new ideas
4. Performance risk taking – taking on challenges
5. Interpersonal risk taking – asking others for help
6. Collaborating – leveraging the skills of others from different functions
7. Information gathering – increasing your knowledge
8. Feedback seeking – asking for feedback
9. Reflecting – taking time to reflect on your effectiveness

Sources: Adapted from elements of Kings Fund blog and Pamela Meyer The Agily Shift

For more information see the fuller guide to managing remote teams on the OD intranet pages or for more information, tips or a coaching conversation contact OD team via [ODenquiries@nhs.net](mailto:ODenquiries@nhs.net)