

Behavioral Interviews – Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, Ambiguous, Risky (VUCAR)

This topic will be centered around Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, Ambiguous, Risky (VUCAR) situations. Basically, situations where you cannot determine with any level of certainty of what might happen with any actions or lack of actions you might take.

STEP 1: WHAT IS YOUR BELIEF?

Reflective Questions:

- For yourself, do you understand the differences between all the types of situations? Can you speak to a key element for each that differentiates one from another?
- Do you have different or similar strategies for dealing with them? For example, do you handle complex situations differently than uncertain situations?
- How do you personally respond to VUCAR situations? How do you believe you should respond to VUCAR? How does that differ depending on whether a leader or employee?
- Everyone has a “negative” emotional response to these situations; how do you counter them? What other emotion do you bring to bear against it?
- How do you lead yourself or others from paralyzing situations?

How the question may show up:

- Tell me about a time you had to make a risky decision.
- How do you deal with an uncertain business decision?
- Have you ever had to make a decision in ambiguity? How did you go about choosing what to do?
- How do you deal with complexity?
- What strategies do you use to mitigate uncertainty/risk?
- Have you ever had something unexpected happen to your project/team/group? How did you deal with it?
- How do you lead in VUCAR situations?
- What if . . . ? (VUCAR can occur in a business context and also with people - like a new boss, new untested colleagues, ambiguous political situations.)

Why are they asking this question?

The modern business world is full of VUCAR. For companies and organizations across industries, technology has disrupted the way we do business. The pace of change has increased as well as the magnitude of the disruption. Many projects are on the leading edge so there aren't necessarily playbooks for how to get things done. Thus, organizations need leaders and employees who are able to effectively manage through VUCAR situations.

Ultimately, navigating VUCAR successfully means managing yourself and your reactions effectively. This in turn, enables you to respond and react to a VUCAR situation more effectively - get unstuck, take action and respond to the consequence.

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STEP 2: WHAT IS YOUR ILLUSTRATING STORY? (YOUR BELIEFS IN ACTION)

The Key Points/Story Beats they are looking for:

- How do you respond when stressed?
- How do you keep from getting paralyzed?
- How do you feel about VUCAR situations? What is your emotional response?
- How do you motivate/move the team/colleagues/others around you in VUCAR situations?
- How do you formulate and execute that first step?
- How do you assess along the way whether what you're doing is effective, and how do you adjust?

Traps in answering this Question

- Not having a real example or avoiding the emotions
- Using a “Knowable” situation as “Unknowable”: “It was uncertain because we didn’t have the report yet . . . (then we got the report)”
- Acting as if VUCAR doesn’t phase you at all: We are all hardwired to find VUCAR situations uncomfortable, how we overcome it or manage those feelings is what’s important. For example, what seems more believable:
 - “Oh, I relish uncertainty. It really makes projects exciting. Whenever I get a chance to step into uncertainty, I take it on . . .” versus
 - “As a project manager you never welcome uncertainty as it can affect the deliverables. It makes me anxious. However, I know it’s a normal part of business, here is how I buffer against it . . . “
- Skipping over the VUCAR challenge, difficulty or mis-step in the story and going straight to the “success”. For example:
 - “The political situation between the clients, their partners and our in-country vendors was really complex because of their previous business dealings - some successful and others not. However, I was able to successfully navigate the relationships by “

By its very nature VUCAR is unpredictable, so mis-steps will happen - it’s how you adjust that’s important. The opportunity to shine in a question about VUCAR is really centered on action, not success. It’s the process of how you respond as the situation unfolds that is compelling. Success in a VUCAR situation is about minimizing paralysis. Even making a conscious decision to do nothing is an appropriate response, as long as it’s intentional, you explain the rationale, and you demonstrate your ability to manage yourself and others in VUCAR contexts.