

# REINVENTING NEW EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS IN THE POST COVID 19 WORKING ENVIRONMENT

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## ABSTRACT

COVID scenario has created a topsy-turvy situation in the whole world, specifically, the employer's mindset and working culture in the industries are in a whirlpool. We live in a VUCA world where the term denotes Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity and Ambiguity. New situations and new catastrophes create new horizons and new opportunities in the job industries. Industries have to redesign new jobs and provide new opportunities to face the paradigm shifts in the job market. The paper aims at exploring the new skills that are arising out of the new normal situation of the VUCA environment. Uncertainty and complex situations have forced the job market to make employees work from home situation. This pandemic period has necessitated the need for reinventing and redesigning new normal and new mode of working conditions. Digital skills and online work forms have become the new game of today. It is imperative for the business to ebb and flow with the changing tides of technology, industry and the global environment. The paper focuses on rediscovering and redesigning the new employability skills that are much significant to face the new norms and new waves of the VUCA world.

**Keywords:** New Employability skills, Psychological Stress, COVID 19 and VUCA Environment, HR Perception, Disruptive Innovation

## INTRODUCTION

COVID 19 has created a pygmalion effect in the world risking the lives of nearly four million people so far. Earlier, the global recession 2008 also created big threats to the world economies and posted questions to the existing economic theories and models. Now, again the pandemic has been challenging the world with the most crucial times the world has ever faced. The corona crisis will make a topsy-turvy situation of the fundamentals of economic theories and models. We are forced to face the after-effects of real 'testing' time (Sthapit 2020a). McKinsey Global Institute report reveals that by 2030 many people will be jobless and the workforce will be automated. More than 375 million workers that is roughly 14 percent of the global workforce might shift from conventional occupation to digitalization and automation (McKinsey 2018). Post-COVID 19 era is full of challenges where we are forced to face instability, agility and curiosity. We are supposed to learn by exploring and learning by doing (Levenson 2020). This research paper explores the nature of the VUCA world, ways of managing the business in the new normal life. The paper aims also at reinventing the employability competencies and strategies to survive in the new normal era.

COVID situation has forced many employees to lose their jobs and many are shifting from the conventional method of work style to online, digital, work from home. This new normal necessitates new approaches, new skills, a new form of digital skills which are mandatory. The objective of the paper is to explore the new approaches and the types of new job skills expected from employers. The research paper starts with introducing the current scenario with objectives followed by a review of the literature. The third chapter enumerates the approaches to the VUCA environment while the fourth and fifth chapters describe the research design and the data analysis. Interpretations and recommendations are presented in the conclusion.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The global pandemic COVID-19 has made a shocking amount of uncertainty due to the massive growth of infections, deaths, and quarantine-related crises. It is now treated as the greatest economic threat since the great depression. The growing fear of contracting the virus, fear of losing friends and loved ones, doubts about job security, and the effects of a quarantine lifestyle have made a

massive impact on the lives of people (Cutler et al., 2020). COVID-19 is having a drastic effect on global economic growth. World Bank report estimates that the global economy may push 71-100 million people below the international poverty line of US\$1.90 per day. We are still facing the brunt of covid effects (Tamrat 2020).

### **What is the VUCA Environment?**

VUCA term was used by the United States Army in 2001. Military planners were perplexed about the uncertain environment that had emerged at that moment so describe it. VUCA stands for Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous situations (Bennett and Lemoine 2014). The storms of COVID 19 have caused several domino effects across the world. Now, we live in a more complex environment. He pondered over the turbulent and unthinkable forces of change that could shake the organizations (Marti 2020a). The illustration given below expounds on the four faces of the VUCA environment.

### **How to Manage in a VUCA World?**

Pandemic has affected and made a lot of uncertainty of the future of business, organizations, etc. The key to managing in this environment is to develop alternatives among anxieties and to identify volatile, uncertain, complex, or ambiguous situations. Amidst tough challenges, there are possible opportunities to overcome this situation. At this crucial moment, leaders should be dynamic visionaries and persons of prompt actions. Leaders should be prepared to face more tough challenges. They should be capable of leading and managing the workforce amid whirlpool. The hour has come to change ambiguity into vision, complexity to understanding, uncertainty to clarity, volatility to agility respectively (Sthapit 2020b).

### **Change of Attitude**

Attitudes play a significant part in the change of the pandemic environment. The educational institutions and the organizations have to craft the employability competency programs that are suitable for this environment. Positive vibrates may activate actions to do promptly and proactively to face the new normal (Buheji and Buheji 2020a). A change of attitude and behavior will be the new norm in a new ambiance. The government has given new norms to maintain social distance and reduce social interactions in public areas (Yamamoto and Karakose 2020).

### **New Forms of Learning in the Higher Education**

In today's COVID scenario, education becomes more accessible from anywhere and anytime. A number of universities have adopted the massive open online course platforms (MOOC) to connect with all the students of their institutes. Through MOOCs students from any part of the world can attend online classes very conveniently. The future of education will become learner-centered instead of a teacher-centered approach (Peters 2017). If anyone wants to survive in the ICT era, one should embrace and deepen digital skills (Colchester Hagraas et al., 2017). Digital competence signifies a wide range of acquired knowledge, gained skills and formed attitudes which are vital for the digital environment (Gasova et al., 2018).

### **Approaches to the VUCA Environment**

#### **Adopting a New Normal**

VUCA world has posted many challenges to develop wider thinking, to make right decisions and act promptly (Chapman 2001). Today's leaders are entrusted with the herculean task of making bold decisions with analytical and integration skills. And they are prepared to face the new normal with authenticity, openness, flexibility and cohesion (Zaucha 2019). The new normal creates new employability skills. They are the ability to work independently in the workplace, competency to associate with teams and staff, to spearhead the new challenges with creativity and innovation and the ability to be flexible to adapt to the new environment (Suartha and Suwintana 2021). The top expected employability skills for the future workforce are innovation, new digital media literacy, social intelligence, continuous learning, flexible mindset, design thinking, responsible digital citizenship, problem-solving, reflective thinking and online collaboration (Andriotis 2017). The ability to quarantine oneself and to work from online mode is a challenging task today. Empathy is another skill as the whole world appreciates the work of the frontline staff in many hospitals and sectors worldwide today (Staboulis and Lazaridou 2020).

#### **Three Horizon Strategy**

Mckinsey proposes the three-horizon strategy to face the new normal. The first horizon is companies should begin to accept and maintain the present core business. The second horizon is the point at which business leaders have to quit their comfort zones.

They aim at replacing the old ones and try to build up and nurture new-age modes and methods. Then comes the 'third horizon'. The leaders think forward with a vision of the futuristic approach and create genuinely a new business (Sinha and Sinha 2020).

### **Digital Transformation**

VUCA world has created a new avatar of digital skills. 87 percent of the companies surveyed said that Digital skilling is very important. 74 percent of the respondents consider it as a key priority. The survey reveals that the most highly wanted jobs are digital business analyst (63 percent), Data Scientist (59 percent), AI and ML Engineers (54 percent) and Digital Marketing Experts (52percent). Digitalization accelerates every business to face new expectations, new norms of working channels, and opportunities. Job opportunities in the field are enormous and over 36,000 cloud jobs are available today (Kumar 2020). Employment opportunities have increased as the world transforms from a conventional method of work to digital working platforms (Martí 2020b).

### **Upskilling is the Name of the Game**

As the business is facing a new normal. The need of the hour is to upskill and reskill the workforce and employees to be ready for a new horizon of opportunities and keep the ball rolling with a continuous learning curve. Many of the world's top companies have identified that the future of jobs is scary and daunting for their workforce. They already foresee the specific skills which require training candidates in the future. To improve employee satisfaction, loyalty and consequently productivity, companies are ready to invest in employee upskilling (Simplilearn Report 2020).

### **Competency Planning with Dimension of 5 P and 5 R**

(Buheji and Buheji 2020) propose employability competencies of 5 P and 5 R dimensions. They are being proactive, preparedness, problem-solving, pulling together, and publishing. To face the new normal in the ICT era, we have to approach the dimensions of the 5 R model. They are reacting, realizing, resolving, reshape and resilient. ECPP model proposes how to apply the 5 P and 5 R models. When the employers face a lockdown situation, they should realize it first then take a step to solve the problem by education and training (ET1) with the skill and experience (SE 3) and with the support of mentoring and guidance if required or learn it by doing oneself (ESR1). Having seen the nature of VUCA and the means to manage, new

strategies to implement in the new norms, let us proceed with the research methodology and data analysis in the forthcoming chapters.

## **Research Methodology**

### **Research Design**

The researcher has chosen Descriptive research for the research study. The researcher chose the convenient sampling method in this work. A pilot study was made in the Chennai region with a questionnaire of 25 samples. About 64 samples were collected from the HR employees of various industries in the Chennai region. And the questionnaire was framed with 3 main constructs based on the nature of work during VUCA, the impact of work from home on employability skills and the dimensions of new digital job skills in the pandemic period.

### **Data Analysis**

The researcher intended to carry out the descriptive and inferential analysis based on the statistical tool SPSS (Version 25) for the data analysis. Hypothesis tests were carried out based on the chosen variables. And the scale reliability analysis was done using the Cronbach alpha reliability test. The result value was 0.678 which showed the adequacy and the reliability of the framed questionnaire.

### **Descriptive Analysis**

Descriptive analysis was used to know the gender of the respondents. More than three fourth of the respondents are male while less than one-fourth of the respondents are female. About half of the respondents fall between the age group of 36 and 45 years old. In the same way, one-fifth of the group come between 46 and 55 while 6 percent of members belong to the age group of 56 and above. This analysis shows that half of the respondents belong to the age group between 36 to 45 years. This is a very prime age for the working class sector.

Employers' working sectors were analyzed. One-third of the respondents work in the IT sector while 12.5 percent of them work in the automobile sector. Fifteen percent of the employers work in the service sector while only six percent of them work in the health and medical sector. Nearly five percent of them work in the bank sector while one-third of the respondents work in various other sectors. Work experience is another important feature that identifies the richness and competency of the

employers. About one-fifth of the respondents have 6 to 10 years, 11 to 15 years and 16 to 20 years of work experience in the human resource field respectively while less than one-fifth of the respondents have more than 25 years of experience.

**Table 1 Independent Sample T-Test for Gender and the level of satisfaction during the VUCA environment**

Group Statistics						
		Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Satisfaction of WFH	Male		54	13.0185	6.91045	.94039
	Female		10	12.1000	6.33246	2.00250

Levene's Test for Equality of Variances.

		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Satisfaction of WFH	Equal variances assumed	.056	.813	.391	62	.697	.91852	2.35119
	Equal variances not assumed			.415	13.29	.685	.91852	2.21232

Independent sample T-Test result reveals that there is no significant level of difference. Hence, H<sub>0</sub> null hypothesis is accepted and the H<sub>1</sub> alternate hypothesis is rejected. It is inferred that there is no significant difference between the mean of male and

female on the level of satisfaction during the VUCA environment. Both male and female feel satisfied equally in the VUCA environment irrespective of a gender group. Their satisfaction level is very normal during the VUCA environment.

**Table 2 ANOVA Test between the age group of the respondents and forming them Techy Savvy**

**Hypothesis (H<sub>0</sub>)**

There is no significant difference in variance concerning to forming Techy-Savvy people and creating work pressure during the VUCA environment and the level of age between 36 years to 65 years old.

Descriptives									
		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Zscore: Satisfaction of WFH	25-35 years	14	-.2944905	1.26588146	.33832105	-1.0253887	.4364077	-2.11641	1.40177
	36-45 years	32	.1374289	.94617870	.16726234	-.2037049	.4785627	-2.11641	1.40177
	46-55 years	14	-.0431919	.88676436	.23699774	-.5551944	.4688106	-1.23686	1.40177
	56-65 years	43	.0824573	.87954499	.43977249	-1.3170950	1.4820097	-1.23686	.52223

	Total	64	.000000	1.000000	.125000	-	.249792	-	1.40177
Zscore: Forming Techy-Saavy	25-35 years	14	-.1840227	1.04791474	.28006700	-.7890707	.4210252	-1.94185	1.74959
	36-45 years	32	.1730363	.94975717	.16789493	-.1693877	.5154603	-1.94185	1.74959
	46-55 years	14	.1675431	.89366469	.23884194	-.3484436	.6835297	-1.94185	1.74959
	56-65 years	4	-1.3266116	.71041815	.35520908	-2.4570454	-.1961778	-1.94185	-.71137
	Total	64	.000000	1.000000	.125000	-	.249792	-	1.74959
						.2497926	.2497926	-1.94185	
Zscore: Independent self learner	25-35 years	14	-.2383584	.90040617	.24064367	-.7582375	.2815206	-1.89979	1.27203
	36-45 years	32	-.0825995	1.14674481	.20271776	-.4960451	.3308461	-2.95706	1.27203
	46-55 years	14	.3657976	.81444802	.21767039	-.1044507	.8360459	-1.89979	1.27203
	56-65 years	4	.2147586	.0000000	.0000000	.2147586	.2147586	.21476	.21476
	Total	64	.000000	1.000000	.125000	-	.249792	-	1.27203
						.2497926	.2497926	-2.95706	
Zscore: Solving Problems by yourself	25-35 years	14	.0938754	.82341853	.22006786	-.3815523	.5693031	-1.51292	1.42123
	36-45 years	32	-.1069743	1.13673187	.20094770	-.5168099	.3028612	-2.49097	1.42123
	46-55 years	14	.0938754	.98607885	.26354066	-.4754696	.6632204	-1.51292	1.42123
	56-65 years	4	.1986666	.48902547	.24451273	-.5794820	.9768152	-.53487	.44318
	Total	64	.0938754	.82341853	.22006786	-.3815523	.5693031	-1.51292	1.42123

	years								
	Total	64	.000000	1.000000	.125000	- .2497926	.2497926	- 2.49097	1.42123
SMEAN (creating work pressure)	25-35 years	14	3.2269	.66452	.17760	2.8432	3.6106	2.00	4.00
	36-45 years	32	3.5233	.67952	.12012	3.2783	3.7683	2.00	4.00
	46-55 years	14	3.5126	.60655	.16211	3.1624	3.8628	2.00	4.00
	56-65 years	4	2.5000	.57735	.28868	1.5813	3.4187	2.00	3.00
	Total	64	3.3922	.69187	.08648	3.2193	3.5650	2.00	4.00

ANOVA						
		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Zscore: Satisfaction of WFH	Between Groups	1.872	3	.624	.612	.610
	Within Groups	61.128	60	1.019		
	Total	63.000	63			
Zscore: Forming Techy-Saavy	Between Groups	8.865	3	2.955	3.275	.027
	Within Groups	54.135	60	.902		
	Total	63.000	63			
Zscore: Independent self learner	Between Groups	3.072	3	1.024	1.025	.388
	Within Groups	59.928	60	.999		
	Total	63.000	63			
Zscore: Solving Problems by yourself	Between Groups	.771	3	.257	.248	.863
	Within Groups	62.229	60	1.037		
	Total	63.000	63			
SMEAN(creating work pressure)	Between Groups	4.319	3	1.440	3.344	.025
	Within Groups	25.837	60	.431		
	Total	30.157	63			

ANOVA test reveals that there is no significant difference in variance concerning people becoming independent self-learners, forming to be more

responsible and solving problems by themselves and the different age groups of the people. But there is a significant difference in variance concerning

respondents becoming Techy-Savvy people and creating more work pressure during the VUCA environment. Hence, we accept the  $H_1$  alternate hypothesis. It is inferred that there is a significant difference in variance concerning forming techy savvy which creates more work pressure on people

### Table 3 Correlations Test

during the VUCA environment based on the level of age group between 36 years to 65 years. They agree that the VUCA environment has been forming them to become equipped with new digital skills along with work pressure.

**Hypothesis ( $H_0$ ):** There is no significant relationship between forming the employees Techy-Savvy and creating work pressure.

Correlations			
		SMEAN (creating work pressure)	Zscore: Forming Techy-Savvy
SMEAN (Creating work pressure)	Pearson Correlation	1	.851**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	64	64
Zscore: Forming Techy-Saavy	Pearson Correlation	.851**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	64	64
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

Data analysis shows that the P-value is significant. Hence, Correlation is significant at 0.01 level. The null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) is rejected and the alternate hypothesis ( $H_1$ ) is accepted. The correlation coefficient is .851. This is an excellent correlation. The relationship is positively proportional. It is

### Table 4 Coefficient Determination of Regression Analysis

inferred that working more to form the employees to learn new skills and become techy-savvy will create more work pressure on the employees during the lockdown.

Model Summary <sup>b</sup>					
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.789 <sup>a</sup>	.623	.617	.42816	2.075
a. Predictors: (Constant), Forming Techy-Saavy					
b. Dependent Variable: SMEAN(creating work pressure)					

ANOVA <sup>a</sup>								
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.		
1	Regression	18.791	1	18.791	102.505	.000 <sup>b</sup>		
	Residual	11.366	62	.183				
	Total	30.157	63					
a. Dependent Variable: SMEAN(creatingworkpressure)								
b. Predictors: (Constant), Forming Techy-Saavy								
Coefficients <sup>a</sup>								
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	2.033	.144		14.072	.000		
	Forming Techy-Saavy	.101	.010	.789	10.124	.000	1.000	1.000
a. Dependent Variable: SMEAN(creating work pressure)								

Collinearity Diagnostics					
Model	Dimension	Eigenvalue	Condition Index	Variance Proportions	
				(Constant)	Forming Techy-Saavy
1	1	1.929	1.000	.04	.04
	2	.071	5.208	.96	.96

a. Dependent Variable: SMEAN(creating work pressure)

ANOVA test result P-value is significant. It shows that this hypothetical test fits into Linear regression. Regression is quantifying. So  $H_0$  is rejected and the  $H_1$  is accepted. For every single unit of increase of work to form the employees to learn new skills to become techy-savvy will create more work pressure of .101 units on the employees during the lockdown. The coefficient determination is represented as  $R^2$  value which is 62.3 This signifies the high explanatory power of the regression model. The slope coefficient is positive and statistically significant. Durbin Watson's value is 2.07 which is at the normal level. This result shows that the data

is free from the error of autocorrelation.  $Y = a + bx + (E)$

Creating Work Pressure = 2.033 +.101 Forming Techy-Savvy employees

**Table 5 Qualitative Analysis**

An open-ended questionnaire was sent to the respondents to find out the challenges they face in this new working culture along with the new skills they propose for the new normal life. The following table shows the response of the participants.

Challenges in the New Normal life	No of Responses	Highly Wanted Skills	No of Responses
Lack of communication and interaction with team members, subordinates and peers	22	Digital Technology skills (AI, Java, cloud computing, AI, machine learning, python, data analytics, data digitalization, programming, automation	22
Working more than 9 hours	15	Communication skill	10
Managing family and work at the same time	10	Dedication and commitment	5
Power cut, poor networks	10	Adapting to new normal, Flexibility, Empathy	4
No peace of mind leads to stress	3	Multi-Tasking	3
Inconvenient working space	3	Agility, Resilience, thinking differently	3
Regular Virtual meetings	3	Planning, coordination and monitoring skills	3
New experience	2	Teamwork and collaboration	2

**Discussions and Interpretations**

The findings show that more than three fourth of the respondents are men while less than one third are female. The age of the respondents reveals that more than half of the respondents are between the age of 36 to 45 years while one-third come under 25 to 35 and 46 to 55 years respectively. The respondents are from different working sectors like one-third of them are from IT and others are from bank, service, medicine and health care, etc., More than one-fifth of the respondents have eleven to fifteen years and sixteen to twenty years of work experience respectively while less than one-fifth of the respondents have more than 25 years of experience. Independent sample T-Test result

reveals that both male and female have the same level of satisfaction during the VUCA environment. ANOVA test shows that there is a significant difference in variance with respect to forming techy savvy people during the VUCA environment based on the level of age group between 36 years to 65 years. They agree that the VUCA environment has been forming them to become equipped with new digital skills. This will help them to become techy-savvy people. Regression coefficient determination analysis reveals that for every unit of increase of work to form the employees to learn new skills in order to make techy-savvy employees, it creates more work pressure during the pandemic period. The new normal COVID era has necessitated new challenges and new forms of skills to work in the new normal world. There is a huge rise to work



anywhere culture creatively and innovatively with flexibility and adaptability.

Data analysis shows that the employees welcome the new normal with a new mindset. They adopt new ways of working from home though it causes long hours of tedious work. They may not get opportunities to collaborate with team members and peers in reality but it is possible virtually with the rise of new digital technology. (Manchanda 2020) reinstates that we have faced many challenges as a human race and overcome them. We cannot rewrite the past but we can learn from them, evolve and adopt new forms. VUCA environment is paving a way for embracing new emerging technologies. (McCormack et al., 2021) suggest that change is a continuous process of aligning with the new normal environment. The key strategy to embrace the VUCA scenario is to develop a change of attitude to approach a problem from different perspectives and plan accordingly when the situation is uncertain and ambiguous. Qualitative analysis also discovers that employees are disconnected from their teammates and peer group members during the lockdown situation. And this pandemic has created long hours of online work with other inconveniences. On the other hand, there is a drastic rise in demand for digital and technical job skills along with flexibility, empathy, and learning to live a new normal in a new normal environment.

## Conclusions

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has made a topsy-turvy situation in the history of mankind. The pandemic continues to create a boomerang effect on various sectors and spheres of our life. It is not the end, we continue to face the consequences of the pandemic very pathetically. It will alter the attitude and behavior of the people in the new normal by creating certain new forms and ways of living our life. We need to rethink in terms of what's important now and in the future, what can create values in personal and professional lives. The research study has proved that we have to learn to adopt a new lifestyle. It has created a paradigm shift in our approach towards work mode. Lockdown restrictions and containment zones have unleashed new avenues for our new jobs. A plethora of new methods and platforms have mushroomed at every nook and corner of our streets. Most of the companies and industries have realized the new forms of work for the employees. Digital jobs and digital skills are most wanted in the new normal workplace. An attitude of flexibility and willingness to adapt to new normal life will motivate us to face new challenges in the VUCA environment. The

present research study has paved the way to do further research on the future of job skills that will be emerging for the new normal life after the pandemic era.

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