

## Chapter 22

# Global Higher Education and VUCA – Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, Ambiguity

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### ABSTRACT

*VUCA describes today's chaotic, turbulent, and rapidly changing education environment, which is the new educational normal. VUCA; volatility, uncertainty, complexity, ambiguity, terms coined for the military world also describes today's education world. As a result, educational leaders face the uncertainty of workforce reductions and budget cuts affecting the process of increasing student performance. In addition, rapid changes in technology are constant and ambiguity reigns as mandates for change increase. In today's education world VUCA, the chaotic "new normal" is real. The financial crisis of 2008-2009, for example, rendered many businesses obsolete, and organizations throughout the world were plunged into turbulent economic environments. At the same time, rapid changes marched forward as technological developments like social media exploded, the world's population continued to simultaneously grow and age, and global disasters disrupted lives, economies, and businesses. In the new normal, higher education institutions are caught in a critically demanding and increasing unknown present and future characterized by volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity.*

### INTRODUCTION

In 2016, as the new normal unfolds; "geopolitical tensions, conflicts around the world", as well as unprecedented issues with immigration to Europe and in the United States are effecting globalization and economic stability. International economic concerns along with past recessions have left nations

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providing decreasing resources for higher education while demanding increases in productivity (Sala-i-Martin, Crotti, Battista, Hanouz, Galvan, Geiger, & Marti, 2015, p. 3).

Higher education institutions, once place-bound, are no longer confined to traditional “brick and mortar” buildings; access to technology has facilitated access to education (Ball, Dworkin & Vryonides, 2010; Glenn, 2008). Anytime/anywhere access to education provides a significant instrument for permitting enhanced economic prosperity as well as social participation of people, demonstrating both the function of democracy and a learning society (Asia Society, 2012). Across international borders, education is viewed as a crucial economic outcome of globalization. Important international decision makers, policy-makers and politicians consider education to be a tradable commodity (Bosworth & Collins, 2008; Tsiligris, 2014).

Economic considerations related to international competitiveness have become a significant driving strength behind the internationalization of learning (Chan & Dimmock, 2008; Cooper, Hersch, & O’Leary, 2012). Along with the movement of goods and general services, the movement of educational services and products has improved significantly in the last decade (Lane & Maznevski, 2014). Education is increasingly seen not only as an export commodity, but also as a key national brand for a nation’s knowledge proficiency (Tsiligris, 2014). Knowledge institutions, whether private or public, are regarded as significant stakeholders in a country’s global and local competitiveness (Levey & Levey, 2013; Sahlberg, 2006; Schwab & Sala-i-Martin, 2015).

As learning becomes increasingly borderless, education ranks increasingly higher on national agendas (Etzkowitz, 2014). Developing countries view increasing education participation as crucial to their transition to developed country standing (Bashir, 2007; Wade, 2008, 2009). The argument that education is a major driver of economic competitiveness in an increasingly knowledge-driven global economy is now widely accepted (David & Halvert, 2015; Wilkinson, 2013). Education drives the economy, but what drives educational productivity?

Globalization with changes in the world’s economy, increasing diversity, and the ubiquitous use of technology is affecting education (Xu, 2007). In a push to be globally competitive, every country, large or small, is tackling educational reform (Jandhvala, 2015). Countries wish to prepare their citizens, who are increasingly diverse in national origin, language, religion, ethnicity, educational background, gender and race, to be globally workforce ready (Skiba, 2015; Lawson, Sanders & Smith, 2015; Zhao, 2012).

Educational attainment affects local and global competitiveness because 80 percent of new jobs created in the global knowledge driven economy will require advanced education (Lemoine & Richardson, 2015). The right to be educated, to acquire knowledge to overcome poverty, and increase social position has been called the great equalizer; however, traditional education is not equally accessible by all citizens because the world is changing rapidly (Barber, Donnelly & Rizvi, 2012; Caminada & Martin, 2012). Technology is transforming lives and living, but education is both a human right in itself and an independent means of realizing other human rights (Zhao, 2012).

Education offers each individual and nation the best chance to survive an unknown future, cope with uncertainty, adapt to evolving conditions and learn how to learn (Darling-Hammond, 2010). As economic pressures to compete have increased, globalization has blurred boundaries of national origins, language, religion, ethnicity, gender, and race; as populations move to changing job markets, education has not remained immune from increases in diversity of policy and politics (Allen, 2012; Dyson, 2015). One common factor is a long-term commitment to education reform by policymakers in high-performing countries (Chen & Kenney, 2007; Barber & Mourshed, 2007, 2009; Mourshed & Barber, 2009).

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