

DiGiPort

*Coping with uncertainty, ambiguity
and risk*



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Introduction



In this module you are going to learn how to deal with uncertain, ambiguous and risky situations and how to make decisions under the pressure of failure. We are going to give you advice on how to prepare for unexpected (and expected) outcomes, as well as how to adapt to those fast-changing environments with agility and flexibility. In the end, we have prepared some guidelines for you to follow, as well as some interesting materials that could help you work better when you feel that everything is going against you.



Learning outcomes



Understand what it means to live in uncertain times, why is it important to be aware of it, and how to deal with it the best in your professional life.



Develop your decision-making and problem-solving skills to endure the times of crisis and plan for them accordingly.



Learning outcomes



Acquire practical knowledge on mastering uncertainty and adapting to changing environments with the best available tools and techniques from the Internet.



Help professionals grow confidence that will prevent giving in to the fear of failure and develop themselves to counter uncertainty with agile and flexible solutions.



Theory



Risk management in art sector

Risk management for the arts and events is crucial as this industry often succumbs to challenges that are hard to predict and plan for (*Risk Management in the Arts*, 2017). Managing this risk is not about trying to stop these things from happening, but about reducing the harmful effect of these risks. It means having a plan on how to deal with unexpected, risky situations and planning adequately to minimize their reoccurrence.

Since many government funding agencies demand a risk evaluation for events or projects, risk management is vital for all art groups. Regularly creating plans and strategies for risk management and making them available to the public have become standard procedures.



Preparing a risk-management plan

The process of creating a risk management strategy should involve thorough techniques for handling risks that are unique to your company, as well as time and money set aside to lessen the chance of negative consequences on the company.

The steps include:

- identifying the risk
- assessing the risk
- treating the risk
- monitoring and reviewing



Risks that might significantly affect an organization's performance and business model should be addressed in this plan . Strategic risks, operational risks or risks connected to creative direction, funding risks, reputational risks or risks related to brands, compliance concerns, environmental hazards, human capital risks, financial reporting risks, and risks associated to the arts sector are a few examples.



Living in uncertain times

VUCA Framework

The corporate sector has seen significant transformation over the past three decades and is now the hub of a transformation that is so quick, continuous, and unpredictable. The feeling of certainty, stability, and familiarity that individuals were used to has been replaced by a condition of change. The abbreviation "VUCA," that stands for "Volatile," "Uncertain," "Complex," and "Ambiguous," can be used to describe this kind of setting.



VUCA Framework explained

After the 9/11 terrorist attacks in 2001, one of the first institutions to utilize this moniker was the United States Army War College. Today's environment is described by the VUCA framework as:



VOLATILITY

The challenge is unexpected or unstable and may be of unknown duration, but it's not necessarily hard to understand; knowledge about is often available.



UNCERTAINTY

Despite a lack of other information, the event's basic cause and effect are known. Change is possible but not a given.



COMPLEXITY

The situation has many interconnected parts and variables. Some information is available or can be predicted, but the volume or nature of it can be overwhelming to process.



AMBIGUITY

Casual relationships are completely unclear. No precedents exist; you face "unknown unknowns."



Tips for handling uncertainty in VUCA world:

- **Counter Volatility With Vision** - Embrace change as a continual, uncontrollable aspect of your working environment to combat volatility. Create a clear, shared future vision and a powerful, compelling statement of the team's goals and values. Be sure to provide your team members adaptable goals that you may change as needed as this will enable them to maneuver through uncertain environments and respond rapidly to changes.
- **Meet Uncertainty With Understanding** - Keep up on industry news and pay close attention to all stakeholders to learn what they desire. Examine and assess your performance. Think about what you did well, what surprised you, and what you could change for the future. You can explore how events can unfold and how you might respond to them in the future by simulating and experimenting with various scenarios. Role playing, scenario and crisis planning, and other similar activities are helpful for developing foresight and getting ready to respond.



Tips for handling uncertainty in VUCA world (Part 2):

- **React to Complexity With Clarity** - Communicate clearly with your team when you respond to complexity. The direction of your team or organization is easier to understand in complex situations thanks to properly defined communications. VUCA circumstances are frequently too complex for one person to handle; therefore, encourage teamwork so that individuals can function well in a quick-paced, unpredictable setting.
- **Fight Ambiguity With Agility** - Promote flexibility, adaptability, and agility to combat ambiguity. Plan but allow for contingency time and be ready to adjust your plans as necessary as events take place.



Fighting Ambiguity with Agility

- ❑ Hire, train, and advance individuals who are collaborative, at ease with change and uncertainty
- ❑ Encourage your staff to think critically and creatively outside of their normal functional areas
- ❑ Establish a collaborative environment and make a concerted effort to forge consensus as you lead your team members rather than dictating to or controlling them. Encourage public discussion, disagreement, and participation from all.
- ❑ The alternate VUCA description is "Vibrant, Unreal, Crazy, and Astonishing," according to Kevin Roberts of the advertising firm Saatchi & Saatchi. This represents the kind of dynamic culture that can give groups and businesses a competitive edge in ambiguous times.
- ❑ Show your team what kind of behavior you appreciate by praising innovations and smart risk-taking actions. Reward team members that exhibit vision, comprehension, clarity, and agility.



Making decisions dealing with uncertainty, ambiguity and risk

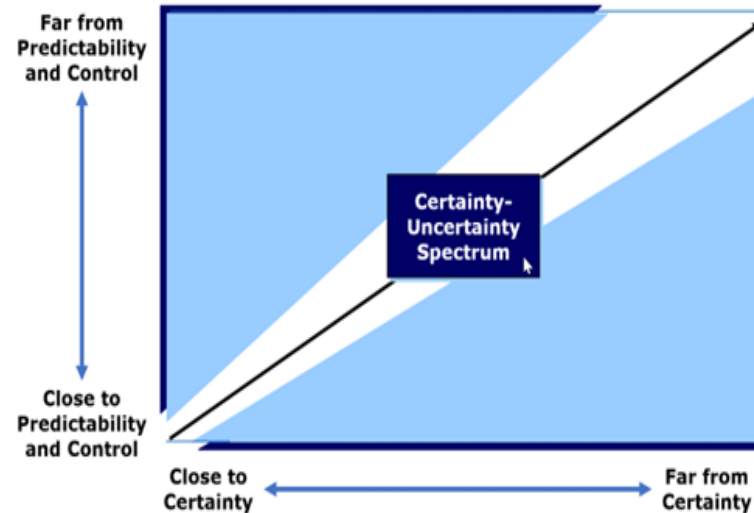
Levels of uncertainty are crucial while making critical decisions. Success in professional (and in your personal life) depends on making wise decisions, especially when there are more unknowns than knowns and knowledge and facts are continually evolving. To enhance our capacity for making decisions and have a beneficial impact on outcomes, it is essential to implement efficient tactics and procedures. At this moment, having useful knowledge that is at your disposal at the time is more important than knowing more about the circumstance.



Trainer's decision-making framework

Trainer (2021) asserts that decision-making has two components:

1. **Degree of certainty** (from very close to very distant from certainty)
2. **Degree of predictability and control** (ranging from close to predictability to far from predictability)



Explanation of the framework

When you make decisions with a low degree of certainty, it usually signifies that there is little to no relevant information available and that the relationships between causes and effects are unclear. At this point, no more data or information will aid our projections more. The conventional planning techniques are not very helpful in this situation because we're unable to plan with certainty or confidence. Instead, only through reaction, resilience, and continuity planning can we be ready for uncertainty. When the causes and consequences cannot be anticipated or identified, you must be flexible and strong, or, to put it another way, you must respond as resolutely and creatively as you can to uncertainties. Contrary to common assumption, this is much more useful than knowledge and efficiency, and because the future is uncertain, you can only make plans when certainties come to pass.



Making decisions under uncertainty

Everything is in a constant state of change and at this point, results are unpredictable and out of your control, and you aren't aware of the opportunities, alternatives, or risks that might be present. The first step is to acknowledge that you don't know and be frank about it because you can only guess at the scenario. You will rely on your judgment and instincts as well as to prod yourself to look for more facts after you get used to being uncomfortable. You are approaching the near to certainty spectrum in this manner.

One method to achieve this is to avoid viewing decisions made in the face of ambiguity as failures and instead see them as flexible, reversible, and decisions that influence future decisions and improvements. Other approaches to deal with uncertainty include networking, collaboration, and knowledge sharing, as well as employing situations to build alternate narratives that consider more possibilities. Another is to discover what we know and what we don't by conducting rigorous experiments and failing.



Making decisions under risk

We have some understanding of the potential outcomes and the likelihood of each scenario occurring while making risky actions. In this case, probability will be more important than certainty and total information. Risks, in contrast to uncertainty, may be controlled. Therefore, it's crucial to distinguish between the two and why it's better to take a chance than to wait to decide. The best knowledge should be at your disposal before making any dangerous decisions so that you may use it to increase your chances of success. Accepting that you will never have complete awareness of the circumstances, you should learn to live with some uncertainty. Accept your less-than-ideal results, understand what they represent, and take the necessary corrective action. Success and failure come in different degrees, so be ready for either. Move forward and avoid overthinking or overcomplicating decisions as most of them can be changed.



Strategies for making decisions under uncertainty and risk:

Trainer (2021) linked back to Jeff Bezos's list of his **four top strategies** for making judgments in risky and uncertain situations:

- concentrate on decision speed to spur innovation (speed matters)
- 70% of the knowledge you wish you had should be used to make judgments (perfection kills, good enough succeeds)
- Most choices are modifiable and reversible.
- disagree, come to a decision, and act right away.

Make decisions despite danger and uncertainty without fear. Consider these choices as chances to achieve; respect risk and uncertainty; become accustomed to them; and learn how to take advantage of them. (2021 Trainer)



Making decisions when the result is uncertain, information ambiguous or with a risk of unintended outcome

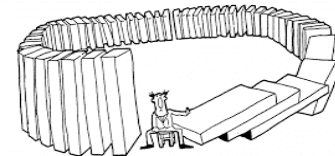
According to Isaac Newton, "there is an equal and opposite reaction to every action." Almost every action we do has the potential to not turn out the way we meant it to in business and many other facets of life. While some of those effects might be largely "accidental" and in our favor, others might turn out to be unpleasant and unanticipated.



Dealing with anticipatory unintended outcomes

Is there a decision-making process that is 100% foolproof, we could wonder? The answer is no, but Duncan (2015) points out certain common-sense rules that can assist us deal with anticipating unexpected consequences:

- Choose what to decide. Many choices can and ought to be left to others. This not only provides them practice, but it also frees you up to concentrate on the decisions that genuinely call for your full attention.
- Talk to subject-matter specialists in a cooperative, independent manner, but stay away from getting bogged down in the board's viewpoint. Ask for opinions from reliable sources but be ready to stand by your own judgment.
- Avoid information bloat; keeping things simple can help you avoid paralysis by analysis, which can result in confusion and poor conclusions.
- Decide what you want to happen. Create a few SMART goals and stick to them. SMART stands for Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-bound.
- Don't anticipate perfection; instead, get the finest information you can, consider the advantages and disadvantages of your alternatives, and make your choice. You probably won't have all the answers, and you can't foresee every conceivable outcome.



Handling fast changing situations promptly and flexibly



Recognizing that there will always be some level of uncertainty is the first step in successfully adjusting to the rapidly changing world. Despite the knowledge and experiences, we have gained in the past, there is frequently no precise formula or answer to an issue. Five ways that make the adaptation simpler for you have been compiled by a Wharton Executive Education study from 2018:

- As author and investment advisor Nassim Taleb put it, "My lesson from [George] Soros is to start every meeting at my trading boutique by persuading everyone that we are a bunch of idiots who know nothing and are mistake prone but happen to be bestowed with the rare pleasure of knowing it."
- Think about more choices - Obtain multiple viewpoints, broaden your horizons, and promote discussion to increase the likelihood of reaching a better decision.
- Increase your chances of success by taking more risks rather than just concentrating on your own thoughts and acceptance.
- Expect to be incorrect; by continuously taking the safe route, you are missing out on a great deal of possibilities.
- Learn and actively determine which approaches are effective and worthwhile.



Flexibility in a workplace

Although adaptability and flexibility can be compared, they are two different concepts. As stated in the Mindtools article titled "How to Be Flexible in the Workplace: Responding to Change Quickly and Positively" (n.d.), our attitudes and behaviors at work can be summed up as follows:

- ❑ Your work style should be adaptable, and you should not be overly focused on your goals.
- ❑ Being able to adjust to the surroundings and the people around us and the current circumstances

It is quite challenging to foresee environmental changes when they do occur. Because of this, flexibility is crucial. Being adaptable makes you more resilient and change-responsive. Flexible individuals are a huge advantage in organizations.



3 types of flexibility that assists leaders in adjusting to change:

1. **Cognitive Flexibility** - Leaders with this quality can use several ways of thinking and conceptual frameworks while planning, making decisions, and managing day-to-day tasks. They can keep several scenarios in mind at once and know when to shift and introduce a change and are able to quickly learn from mistakes and spot when tried-and-true methods no longer work.
2. **Emotional Flexibility** - Leaders with this flexibility change how they cope with their own emotions and the emotions of others, which is a skill that many leaders often overlook. A leader that is emotionally adaptable is at ease with the transition process, including complaints, trepidation, and opposition, and they keep the plan moving.
3. **Dispositional Flexibility** - Leaders that exhibit dispositional flexibility, also known as personality-related flexibility, maintain an upbeat attitude while remaining open-minded and realistic. While acknowledging a poor situation, they will also picture a better scenario. Ambiguity is accepted since they view the transition as an opportunity rather than a threat or risk.



Individual development of artists and industry professionals

The arts and cultural industries have seen a wave of solidarity throughout the health crisis and the historic times we've been living in, making common ground in the quest for solutions. The steps made to deal with the uncertainty of today's world will help the industry in the long run because industry trends are shifting and opening opportunities for innovation and progress.



How to progress as an artist professional?

Here are some recommendations by UNESCO's book "Culture in Crisis" (2020) on individual development of artists and art industry professionals:

- The entire value chain—creation, production, distribution, and consumption—should be taken into consideration. Support management, networking, cooperation, partnerships, and digital abilities for conception, production, and dissemination in addition to the creative side.
- Encourage the development of transferable abilities while preserving creative flexibility. Encourage and assist, but don't place restrictions.
- Favor sharing knowledge. Lessons learnt should be communicated for the benefit of everybody, in order to strengthen the resiliency of the cultural sector.



How to progress as an artist professional? (Part 2)

- Put new knowledge into practice as soon as possible to reduce the chance of going back to old habits. If strategies for project financing and public distribution are not included, skills development programs run the danger of being ineffective.
- Avoid conveying the idea that any time spent learning is only a temporary measure until one's regular work can resume. Time should be allotted for group discussion and input.
- The effectiveness of the lessons acquired will be demonstrated through experimentation. The training material can be modified with the help of feedback.
- Capacity development will benefit from this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to dedicate time to learning, but it shouldn't end once the recovery is underway.



Risk mitigation strategies

Risk mitigation enables you to comprehend the overall risk you are willing to take by helping you anticipate the likelihood and impact of threats. Several strategies are frequently utilized in parallel while reducing risk.

1. **Prioritize risk** - Analyze the regions on which your company depends. You first need to manage these risks and prioritize categories or procedures in terms of risk. You can only effectively minimize risk in your organization through a holistic strategy.
2. **Accept risk** - The majority of people are aware of Murphy's law, which states that whenever something can go wrong, it will, and at the worst time. Risk acceptance, which includes accepting the likelihood of a danger as well as its consequences, is a necessary component of risk mitigation.
3. **Avoid risk** - Risk avoidance is a form of risk mitigation. At this point, businesses take preventative steps to avoid particular risks that they have identified prior.
4. **Minimize risk** - Similar to this, risk reduction aims to reduce certain hazards and their effects. The threat is diminished with the aid of supplier evaluation and constant real-time monitoring.



Best practices



In the next few slides, you are going to see a few tips and guidelines that can boost your decision-making skills when faced with uncertain situations, as well as to help you adapt to changes that can consequently occur within your workplace. We've put in some videos in there for you, as well, to review what you have learned up until now and hear about more helpful advice from other art professionals.



Tips for making decisions in uncertain situations:

- **Have a clear idea of what you want to accomplish, rather than weighing your options** - choose the issue you wish to answer, specify the success criteria, and assess the possibilities considering how they will affect the implementation of your vision. This will assist you in avoiding the pitfall of comparing options when there is insufficient data.
- **Create a group where you can gather a variety of viewpoints** - since uncertain situations are by their very nature highly ambivalent, bringing together individuals who have various viewpoints on the topic enables a more thorough vision.
- **Clarify the uncertainty** - calculate the risks or uncertainty's positive and negative effects. Risk-taking for good prospects can be encouraged by being aware of the prospective profits and drawbacks.
- **Act immediately** - waiting will limit the possibilities you have. Rapid decision-making enables you to move quickly and increases your chances of escaping ambiguity.
- **Avoid unnecessary risk** - defer dangers that are within your control when the environment is exceptionally unpredictable. For instance, delaying going on debt to buy a new car while the economy is shaky.



Tips for making decisions in uncertain situations (Cont):

- **Don't wait for more information before reacting** - desiring more facts is okay since it allows us to learn more about the problem and develop a more thorough knowledge. However, the consequence of delaying and acquiring more information is the inability to make a choice, especially since the data we want is frequently unavailable.
- **Increase reversibility and options** - when making selections quickly, there is a chance that you will choose poorly due to incomplete information. You can change your mind if new information comes to light by identifying many possibilities and deciding the circumstances of their adoption. A wide variety of choices enhances adaptability to an unpredictable future. As one gains knowledge, one's options can be narrowed.
- **When possible, only take one risk at a time** - combining risks from numerous decisions can be confusing, stressful, and make it challenging to learn from failed outcomes. An example of this would be choosing to get married and taking on a new international project at the same time.
- **Increase monitoring and evaluation for decision-making in uncertain situations** - manage decisions adaptively and be ready to adjust as new information comes to light.



Tips for adapting to changes in your workplace:

- **Be optimistic and embrace the change** - Even if it seems frightening, change doesn't have to hurt productivity, creativity, or seem dangerous to your outcomes. Instead, focus on the advantages and welcome the change. Gaining an understanding of this concept can increase your motivation and make you more resilient because it frequently ushers in new chances.
- **Get ready for the approaching change by being proactive, making a backup plan, and dealing with challenges** - Many organizational leaders in business use a variety of change management technologies, such as digital adoption platforms, to ensure the success of their efforts and to assist in reskilling their staff.
- **Develop your skill set** - By utilizing these circumstances increase your curiosity about the world around you, stay current on industry trends through study, and expand your knowledge base.
- **Have a solid support system in place** - By developing trust with your coworkers or team members, you may deepen your connections and feel more confident through trying times.



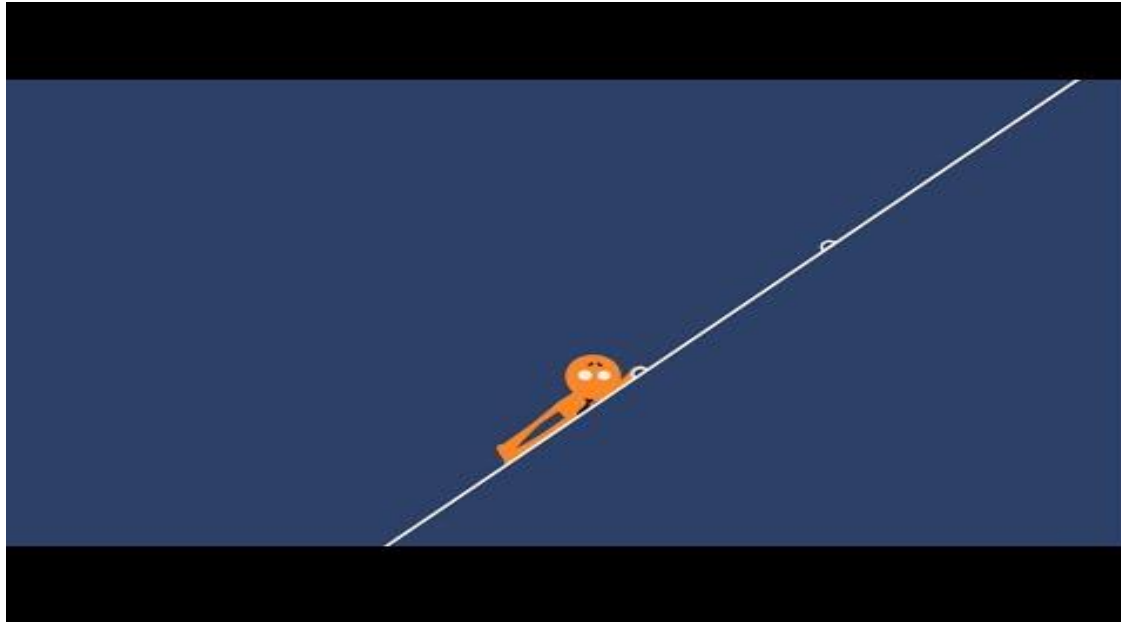
Tips for adapting to changes in your workplace (Cont.):

- **Make a list of SMART goals and figure out how to achieve them while considering the changes in your surroundings** - Set new goals and immerse yourself in novel environment. Meet new people, experiment with the newest trends, and use them every day.
- **Focus on the things you can influence** - Be flexible with your work and own responsibility for the things you can still influence. Concentrate on your basic principles and what remains constant about you and the culture of your company.
- **Write down the worst-case scenario** - If you can embrace the worst-case scenario, you can cope with the concerns and uncertain outcomes that are just preventing you from taking action to move forward more effectively. Write out the worst-case scenario.

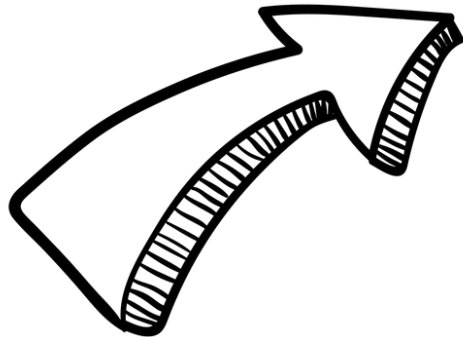


Watch this Mindtools' video to get reminded of the most effective practices of coping with uncertainty

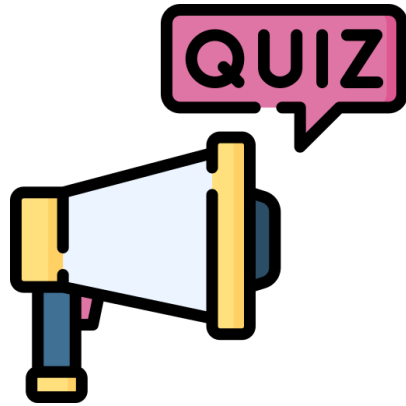
https://www.youtube.com/watch?reload=9&time_continue=36&v=S3CU2kOBt3s&feature=emb_title



Listen to this episode of Malcom Dewes' 'An Artist's Journey' podcast where he discusses growing your art business in uncertain times with a fellow female artist and art coach



https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=620&v=l-agABYJ-M4&feature=emb_title



QUIZZ TIME!

A pink silhouette of a human head in profile, facing right. Inside the head is a large, stylized question mark.

Now let's test your knowledge on the topic and see how good you are at coping with uncertainty and risk.

Good luck!



Q1. What is not a part of the risk management process?

- a) assessing the risk
- b) reviewing the risk
- c) avoiding the risk
- d) treating the risk

Q2. What does the acronym VUCA stand for?

- a) volatile; uncertain; complex; ambitious
- b) volatile; uncertain; complex; ambiguous
- c) valiant; unequalled; calm; agile
- d) valiant; unequalled; crazy; ambitious



Q3. What is recommended when dealing with uncertainty in VUCA world?

- a) replace ambiguity with agility
- b) combat volatility with clear and shared vision
- c) when uncertainty is lurking, learn more about the environment and about your own performance
- d) communicate and lead with clarity
- e) all of the above

Q4. What are the two main components of Trainer's decision-making model?

- a) Degree of certainty & degree of predictability
- b) Degree of certainty & degree of uncertainty
- c) Degree of stability & degree of predictability
- d) Degree of stability & degree of uncertainty



Q5. Which one of these is not a risk mitigating strategy?

- a) Risk limitation
- b) Risk avoidance
- c) Risk acceptance
- d) Risk study



Q6. What are the characteristics of leaders in possession of a dispositional flexibility?

- a) They can keep several scenarios in mind at once and know when to introduce a change; they are able to quickly learn from mistakes and spot when tried methods no longer work
- b) These leaders maintain an upbeat attitude while remaining open-minded and realistic; they can picture a better scenario while acknowledging a poor situation and view transition as an opportunity
- c) A leader that is emotionally adaptable is at ease with the transition process, including complaints, trepidation, and opposition, and they keep the plan moving



Q7. What is not a recommendation when making a decision under uncertainty?

- a) Gather a group from which you can get different perspectives on the problem
- b) Be careful to collect enough information on the situation before you go into action
- c) Identify as many alternatives as possible and learn what could stand in the way of their adoption
- d) All the above are correct



Q8. How can an art professional progress in times of uncertainty?

- a) They primarily focus on artist's goals and how to achieve them as they are the ones delivering the finished work
- b) Bond with the team but do not overshare your secrets and ways to get to success; do not overly trust people in this industry
- c) Foster the skills you have and try to apply them to different situations; there is high probability what you already possess is what is needed somewhere
- d) None of these are characteristics of an evolving artist, moreover, they are a complete opposite





Answers

1. c) avoiding the risk
2. b) volatile; uncertain; complex; ambiguous
3. e) all of the above
4. a) Degree of certainty & degree of predictability
5. d) risk study
6. b) These leaders maintain an upbeat attitude while remaining open-minded and realistic; they can picture a better scenario while acknowledging a poor situation and view transition as an opportunity
7. b) Be careful to collect enough information on the situation before you go into action
8. d) None of these are characteristics of an evolving artist, moreover, they are a complete opposite





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