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FOSTERING HUMANISTIC AND COMPETENCE-BASED EDUCATION FOR RESILIENT ORGANISATIONS IN A VUCA WORLD

Dr. Palmira López-Fresno
Professor Intellectual Capital and Talent Management
EAE Business School. Barcelona, Spain.
Distinguished Keynote Speaker, 24th Int. Conf. on ISO & TQM (**24-ICIT**)

Prof. Samuel K. M. HO
Research Professor & Founder-Chair, **24-ICIT** at GCC (www.hk5sa.com/icit)
Ex-Prof. & Speaker, Oxford U.; Ex-Research Fellow, Cambridge U.

ABSTRACT

An increasingly VUCA environment demands continuous adaptation, resilience, and innovation from individuals and organisations for survival and competitiveness. Traditional linear problem-solving methods are inadequate for adaptive complex challenges, which require individuals and organisations to develop new capabilities to survive and thrive. Instead, systems thinking rooted in human positive values, along with new knowledge and appropriate skills, are essential. Education institutions face the challenge of shifting towards humanistic, competence-based education to develop these capabilities, fostering resilience and preparing individuals and organisations to prosper in a complex world. Bloom's Taxonomy and Inner Development Goals offer effective frameworks to advance this shift. In summary, fostering humanistic and competence-based education is crucial for building resilient organizations capable of thriving in a VUCA world. By focusing on essential competencies and creating supportive learning environments, organizations can enhance their adaptability, innovation, and overall effectiveness.

Keywords: Bloom Taxonomy, Competence-based education, Education, Inner Development Goals, IDGs, Resilience, SDGs, VUCA.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Today's increasingly Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, and Ambiguous (**VUCA**) environment poses unprecedented challenges to individuals, organisations, families, and societies (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014). Oxford University refers to disruptions due to Turbulent, Uncertain, Novel, and Ambiguous (TUNA) conditions (Oxford University, 2023), highlighting the turbulence and novelty that also characterise the current environment. Successfully navigating these challenges is essential for survival and success, and in the process, strengthens both individuals and the organisations with which they work or collaborate.

Challenges, especially those that are complex, adaptive, innovative, or transformative (Heifetz, 2023), cannot be solved using simplistic and mechanistic approaches, as past solutions may no longer be valid and past performance does not guarantee future results (Ramos & Sarrico, 2016). Traditional linear problem-solving methods fall short. As Coelho (2003:11) aptly stated, "Just as I succeeded in finding all the answers, all the questions changed." The VUCA/TUNA environment continually poses new questions. Tackling these challenges should lead to the development of new organisational capacities, including resilience as a key ability for success, which will support facing future similar challenges. Since individuals and organisations have managed past challenges, new ones of similar nature can be approached as simple technical issues (Heifetz, 2023). This process should create a virtuous cycle that enhances individual and organisational resilience, a property essential for leadership and competitiveness.

When the mechanisms to cope with and effectively tackle the increasing and often complex demands from the environment fail, it can lead to stress and illness (Orsolini, Ricci, Cicolini, & Volpe, 2023; Rantanen et al., 2021) or to organisational loss of competitiveness (Oxford University, 2023). Only those organisations that can incorporate systemic innovative processes and product development will be more resilient and competitive (Castellacci, 2008; López-Fresno, 2009).

Surviving and succeeding in an increasingly VUCA/TUNA environment requires healthy individuals and the application of systems thinking to complexity, rooted in positive values and attitudes. It also necessitates new knowledge and appropriate skills at both the individual and organisational levels, along with collaborative approaches. As Donella Meadows (2008) stated, we have been taught to use analytical thinking, our rational capacity, to directly relate causes and effects, to study phenomena by breaking them down into small, comprehensible parts, and to solve problems by intervening in or controlling the world around us (Meadows, 2008). However, to face the challenges posed by the VUCA/TUNA environment, it is necessary to change the paradigm and think from the perspective of complexity. This requires educating and training from a holistic thinking perspective, rather than an analytical and mechanistic one. It is also essential to capture and teach professional attitudes and soft skills. Skills such as analytical thinking and innovation; active learning and learning strategies; complex problem-solving; critical thinking and analysis; and creativity, originality, and initiative are among the top five soft skills required by the industry globally (WEF, 2020).

This has sparked intense debates and research on how education systems should change to address the challenges of the 21st century (e.g., Gilyazova & Ваганова, 2021; Sharp, 2023; Zovko, 2023) to foster healthy and high-performing individuals and organisations. It has also led to integrative approaches to well-being, including those from Lifestyle Medicine (Phillips, Frates & Park, 2020) and Neurosciences for Business (MIT, 2021; López-Fresno, 2024a).

This paper contributes to both academic and practical debates by analysing and proposing two frameworks for humanistic and competence-based education: Inner Development Goals (IDGs) and Bloom's Taxonomy. The paper is structured into four sections. Following this introduction (Section 1), the IDGs framework is presented, along with a summary of its implementation at a Business School in Spain (Section 2). A brief analysis of Bloom's Taxonomy is provided in Section 3, and Conclusion follows in Section 4.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Fostering humanistic and competence-based education is essential for developing resilient organizations in a VUCA (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity) world. The following insights highlight the importance of such educational frameworks and their implications for organizational resilience (Shet, 2024).

2.1. Importance of Competencies in a VUCA Environment

2.1.1. Employee Competency Framework

A recent study developed a competency framework specifically for VUCA environments, identifying ten essential competencies categorized into cognitive, cross-cultural, analytical, and personal effectiveness competencies. These competencies include cognitive flexibility, creativity, personal resilience, and continuous learning, which are crucial for thriving in unpredictable settings.

2.1.2. Learning and Development Interventions

The study also emphasizes the need for tailored learning and development (L&D) interventions that align with these competencies. By integrating these competencies into L&D programs, organizations can enhance employee adaptability and performance, thereby fostering resilience.

2.2. Humanistic Education Approach

2.2.1. Focus on Human Values

Humanistic education emphasizes the development of the whole person, including emotional and social dimensions. This approach is vital in VUCA contexts, where understanding and managing human relationships and emotions can significantly impact organizational effectiveness.

2.2.2. Creating a Supportive Learning Environment

Organizations that adopt a humanistic approach to education create environments that encourage collaboration, empathy, and ethical decision-making. This is particularly important in VUCA settings, where rapid changes can lead to stress and uncertainty among employees.

2.3. Implications for Organizational Resilience

2.3.1. Adaptability and Innovation

By fostering a culture of continuous learning and humanistic values, organizations can enhance their adaptability and capacity for innovation. This is critical in navigating the complexities and uncertainties characteristic of VUCA environments.

2.3.2. Employee Engagement and Well-being

A focus on humanistic education contributes to higher employee engagement and well-being, which are essential for maintaining productivity and morale during challenging times. Engaged employees are more likely to contribute positively to organizational resilience.

Cernega et.al (2024) claim that their professional activity is constantly under pressure from a multitude of elements and factors that can be classified into the four components of the VUCA phenomenon—volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity—components that define the turbulence and challenges of the external environment. Considering the general elements of this phenomenon, we designed a new VUCA dimension specific to the healthcare field within which we have identified and analyzed all the factors that can influence the main actors of the doctor–patient relationship and the effects that can occur within the healthcare system in which this relationship is born. In this context, we generated the VUCA treatment in healthcare capable of mitigating the impact of this phenomenon; this treatment involves essential elements in overcoming possible crises and vulnerabilities of the medical profession.

The VUCA treatment in healthcare requires combating volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity through vision, understanding, clarity, and agility, which are grounded in the doctor's need to acquire cross-functional competencies (soft skills). These competencies are applicable by using functional mechanisms and techniques that support the doctor in developing adaptability and anticipation skills, understanding the patient's needs and addressing them, and ensuring the functionality and efficiency of the healthcare system by transferring these elements from micro-management to macro-management levels.

Esenyel (2024) in his present study examines the correlation between current leadership models and three key elements of contemporary society: the volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) environment, the rapid digital revolution occurring in our surroundings, and the emergence of the next generation within our organizations. This study presents a framework for successfully incorporating and applying several leadership paradigms in exploratory, reflective, and analytical operations. Effective leadership in the digital era necessitates the use of a variety of leadership styles. Companies must succeed in integrating into the varied and inclusive work environment required by modern society.

Achieving the desired results requires not just the abandonment of past methods but also the commitment to applying "next practices". The current leadership concepts should be in accordance with the prevailing working conditions and beliefs of the current employee and those of future employees. By adopting the viewpoint of the "next up", existing leadership theories can better accommodate the emotional, historical, and intrinsically imperfect situations that present leadership usually perceives and utilizes to evaluate its activities. The complex structure of this study's framework enables the use of a single, collaborative, robust leadership model to drive rapid and seamless digital transformation in both enterprises and the contexts that initiate and guide such changes. Furthermore, it enables the exploration of the possible benefits of this approach for both the leaders and team members who struggle with the complexity of these adjustments.

In summary, fostering humanistic and competence-based education is crucial for building resilient organizations capable of thriving in a VUCA world. By focusing on essential competencies and creating supportive learning environments, organizations can enhance their adaptability, innovation, and overall effectiveness.

3. ADVANCING HUMANISTIC EDUCTAION THROUGH IDGS

3.1. IDGs Framework

Humanistic education, also known as person-centred education, is an approach that emphasises the development of the whole person, including intellectual, emotional, social, and artistic aspects (Kumari, 2024; Lyon, 1969, Rogers, 1969).

In 2015, the UN Member States adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, presenting an ambitious "action plan for people, the planet, and prosperity" through 17 interlinked Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets. These goals aim to address the priority issues humanity faces in a multidimensional manner. However, the 2023 Sustainable Development Report (UN, 2023) indicates that, on average, only 16 percent of the SDG targets are on track to be achieved by 2030. For the remaining 84 percent, progress is limited or reversed, necessitating new approaches focused on enhancing collective capabilities to effectively tackle complex challenges.

While the commitment to the SDGs occurs at the national level, their implementation is a shared responsibility that requires socially responsible individuals - entailing a fundamental change in human values and skills - effective articulation, and leadership capabilities, among other factors. This leads to increased collective capabilities. Otherwise, solutions to global challenges may be limited, too slow, or short-lived (IDG, 2021). Therefore, it is necessary to develop transformative skills for sustainability, which mostly align with the so-called "soft skills."

The IDGs framework integrates 23 inner skills into five dimensions: Being, Thinking, Relating, Collaborating, and Acting (Figure 1). The model begins with the individual as a key element (the "Being") and gradually addresses the relationship of that element with the environment: how one thinks, relates, collaborates with others, and acts in all areas. Thus, the framework is based on the basic principle of complexity: adaptive interaction. In this sense, "Being" refers to the relationship with oneself, introspective analysis, and development; "Thinking" involves cognitive abilities; "Relating" refers to the interaction and care for other people and the world; "Collaborating" involves social skills to work collaboratively; and "Acting" implies the impulse for change (López-Fresno, 2024b). Therefore, there is an undeniable ethical foundation.

The framework is relatively simple, as the skills are only broadly defined and often partly overlapping, what constitutes one usual critique (Engel & Janssen, 2024). Answering this critique, the IDGs initiative notes on its website: “The framework’s simplicity is a design principle, both keeping it easy to communicate and relatively ‘naked’ or decontextualised, ready to be re-contextualised within specific training or personal development approaches […] This adaptability allows it to be tailored to diverse cultural and societal contexts, ensuring its relevance across different settings” (IDG, n.d.). The framework’s “relative nakedness”, while imposing challenges in its application has strong merits (Engel & Janssen, 2024), as it facilitates its integration and embeddedness with other initiatives.

The IDGs can be applied at the individual level, as a guide for our personal and professional development. They can also be taken by organisations as a reference for their human capital development programs. And, finally, education institutions can take IDGs as a guide to develop their students' values and skills. It has long been acknowledged that education is among “the most powerful and proven vehicles for sustainable development” (Wamsler, 2020), that starts from socially responsible individuals (López-Fresno, 2024b).

Figure-1: Inner Development Goals. Source: IDG Foundation

Higher education institutions can do far-reaching contribution to accelerate human development and collective learning with an impact in a shorter term. While specific courses on sustainability, and on leadership for sustainability are an option, their focus should be on developing the necessary knowledge and capabilities for the current professionals or already graduate students.

This requires developing leadership and management capabilities rooted on positive human values, oriented to integrity, self-awareness, systemic and critical thinking, and collaboration, among others. Skills that come from the inner to catalyse outer change. As these institutions address and train young adults, they play a major role in shaping future leaders and decision-makers, thereby having the potential to become a major motor for change (López-Fresno & López-García, 2024).

3.2. Application of IDGs Framework at a Master Level

At EAE Business School (Barcelona, Spain) a Master in Management and STEM is delivered annually in two editions. One subject, Leadership and Management Skills, covers six main themes (leadership, teamwork & motivation, emotional intelligence, conflict management, negotiation, time management & stress management) and integrates several soft skills over 40 hours of teaching. The Master is accredited by a partner university, so curricular changes require a lengthy validation process. The case study focused on embedding the IDGs into the methodology and materials of the subject for the October 2023 edition, with lectures delivered in January-February 2024, without altering the program.

Using Donati's relational analysis method (Donati, 2011), a table was created to link the subject content to the IDGs by dimensions and skills. The five IDGs dimensions and 23 related skills were embedded to guide lecturers in integrating these skills through course methodology and materials. The aim was to develop students' understanding of the IDG framework and its connection to leadership and management values and skills, rather than providing specific knowledge about the IDGs as a standalone course.

This approach allowed students to strengthen selected IDGs, preparing them to contribute to sustainable development in their personal and professional lives. Thus, the IDGs framework supports a holistic approach to values and skills for sustainable development, beginning with more conscious and responsible individuals.

The teaching approach in the Leadership and Management Skills subject traditionally emphasised socially responsible management, with a constructivist and systemic perspective integrating IDGs values and skills, such as self-awareness, openness, learning mindset, critical thinking, long-term orientation, trust, co-creation, creativity, appreciation, humility, integrity, authenticity, inclusive mindset, intercultural competence, and sense-making. This facilitated embedding the IDGs to enhance alignment and impact on learning outcomes towards sustainability. The methodology combined conceptual knowledge with practical tools, including individual and group reflection, real case studies, and extensive teamwork, conveyed in an appreciative, supportive, and relational manner (Ayers, Bryant, & Missimer, 2020; Walsh, Böhme, Lavelle, & Wamsler, 2020).

One assignment in the Leadership and Management Skills subject was a learning journal, where students reflected on the knowledge and abilities they acquired, considering their prior experiences, knowledge, views, and related readings (López-Fresno, Savolainen, & González-Díaz, 2022). The learning journals were analysed using interpretative content analysis (Krippendorf, 1980). The most frequently mentioned IDGs dimensions were Thinking, Relating, and Collaborating, although all five dimensions were referenced to varying degrees. Being was mentioned in relation to Personal Sustainability, while Thinking was linked to Critical Thinking and Complexity Awareness. Key takeaways included Self-awareness, Learning Mindset, Visioning, Humility, Trust, Appreciation, Connectedness, Inclusive Mindset, Perseverance, and Sense-making.

The IDGs framework has proven effective in conveying and strengthening values and skills for more conscious and responsible individuals, contributing to a more sustainable world. The research conducted expands the evidence base for innovative and integral teaching approaches. Key success factors include the openness of the IDGs framework, which provides "ingredients" rather than "recipes," facilitating its embedding in teaching programs. Additionally, alignment with the lecturer's beliefs and approach towards sustainability enhances effective embedding. Consistent with Engel and Janssen (2024), when lecturers share personal insights on their inner development, it encourages deep sense-making among students.

3.3. Enhancing Competence-Based Education Through Bloom's Taxonomy

Competence-based education focuses on the acquisition of specific skills and knowledge that are directly applicable to professional practice (Açıkgöz & Babadoğan, 2021, Levine & Patrick, 2019; Vignare, 2014). Usually it emphasises mastery of competencies through practical application and continuous assessment.

To effectively address the challenges of the VUCE/TUNA environment, it is crucial to develop specific hard and soft skills across various sectors (WEF, 2020). These skills are based on high-order cognitive abilities that empower individuals to critically analyse and evaluate information, identify relationships among concepts, and drive innovation, as delineated in Bloom's Taxonomy.

Bloom's Taxonomy is a hierarchical framework for categorising educational goals and objectives, developed by Benjamin Bloom and colleagues in 1956 (Bloom, et al, 1956). It classifies cognitive skills and learning behaviours into six levels, ranging from basic to complex.

The original taxonomy includes the following levels: Knowledge, Comprehension, Application, Analysis, Synthesis, and Evaluation. Each level represents a different degree of cognitive complexity, with Knowledge being the most basic and Evaluation being the most advanced.

In 2001, Lorin Anderson and David Krathwohl revised Bloom's Taxonomy to reflect a more active and dynamic view of learning. This led to a revised taxonomy that includes the following levels: Remembering, Understanding, Applying, Analysing, Evaluating, and Creating (Figure-2). The updated version emphasises the importance of higher-order thinking skills, such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and creativity.

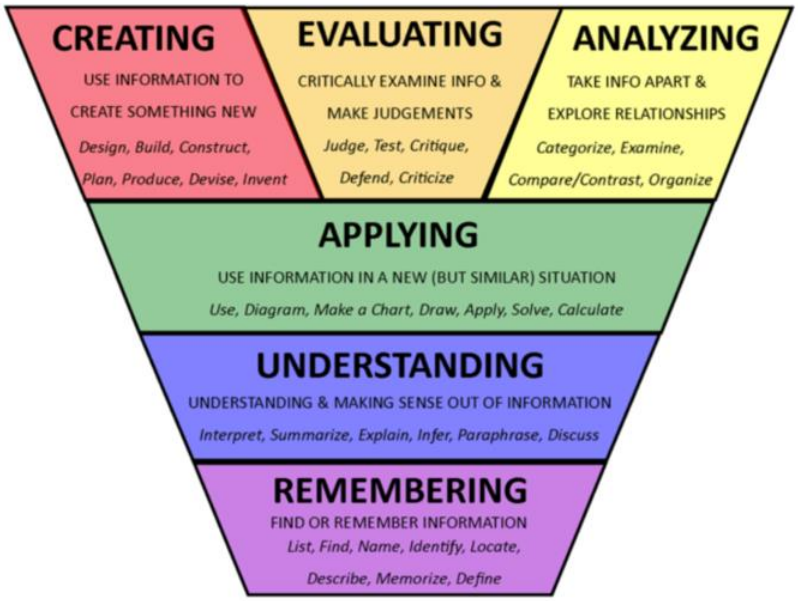

Figure-2: Bloom´s Taxonomy. Source: Derek Bok Center for Teaching and Learning at Harvard University

In the revised taxonomy, knowledge is at the basis of these six cognitive processes, and its authors created a separate taxonomy of four types of knowledge used in cognition (Armstrong, 2010): i) Factual; ii) Conceptual; iii) Procedural; iv) Metacognitive, as follows:

- *Factual knowledge* includes knowledge of terminology and knowledge of specific details and elements.
- *Conceptual knowledge* includes knowledge related to classifications and categories, principles and generalisations, and theories, models, and structures.
- *Procedural knowledge* includes knowledge of subject-specific skills and algorithms, of subject-specific techniques and methods, and of criteria for determining when to use appropriate procedures.
- *Metacognitive knowledge* includes strategic knowledge, knowledge about cognitive tasks, including appropriate contextual and conditional knowledge, and self-knowledge.

While all four types of knowledge are relevant for addressing the challenges posed by an increasingly VUCA/TUNA environment at both individual and organisational levels, metacognitive knowledge is particularly crucial. It enables a deeper comprehension of complex systems and fosters resilience by understanding dynamic interactions and feedback loops that drive system behaviour. This underscores the need for education institutions to emphasise metacognition (Sarkar & Al Mamun, 2023; Fernández-González & López-Fresno, 2019).

Bloom's Taxonomy has been widely adopted in educational settings to design curricula, develop instructional materials, and assess student learning outcomes at both global and specific subject levels. It provides a common language for educators to discuss and implement educational objectives, ensuring that teaching and assessment practices are aligned with desired learning outcomes, including those related to humanistic education. Bloom's Taxonomy is also applied at the EAE Business School in Barcelona, Spain.

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, fostering humanistic and competence-based education is essential for developing resilient organisations in a VUCA world. By integrating frameworks such as Bloom's Taxonomy and Inner Development Goals (IDGs), educational institutions can cultivate the necessary skills and values for individuals to navigate complex challenges. This holistic approach emphasises systems thinking, critical thinking, creativity, and collaboration, preparing individuals and organisations to thrive amidst volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity. Ultimately, this shift in education fosters a more sustainable and resilient future. In summary, fostering humanistic and competence-based education is crucial for building resilient organizations capable of thriving in a VUCA world. By focusing on essential competencies and creating supportive learning environments, organizations can enhance their adaptability, innovation, and overall effectiveness.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Palmira López-Fresno -- Professor, international consultant, assessor, and Chief Technical Advisor for UN agencies and other development partners. She has served as President of the Service Quality Committee at the Spanish Association for Quality (AEC) for 14 years and as Vice President of the AEC for 8 years. Previously, she held roles as Quality Director, Consultant, Trainer, and Advisor in both public and private sector organizations. Her research interests include Integrated Management, Business Process Management, Service Quality, and Trust. She has published numerous business articles and several academic papers in these areas. With extensive international experience in 65 countries, Dr. López-Fresno is a solid professional specialised in a wide range of areas and strategies to enhance competitiveness. She encourages positive change and works collaboratively to provide high value towards a better world. plopezfresno@campuseae.es

Samuel K. M. HO 0000-0002-8102-1481 -- Research Professor at the Gratia Christian College in the HKSAR. As an ex-Research Fellow in TQM at Cambridge U., and Guest Speaker in Lean Mgt. at Oxford U., he was also Visiting Professor in TQM at Coventry, Paisley, RMIT, Linnaeux, NUS, HKU, CUHK, PKU, THU & SYSU. During 2000-2005, he was the Chief Editor of the Journal of Service Management (Ranked Q1 with H-88 by **SJR**). As the Founder Chair of the Int. Conf. on ISO & TQM (**ICIT**), he is chairing the **24-ICIT** at GCC during 2025/2/6-8. (www.hk5sa.com/icit)

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RESEARCH ETHICS APPROVAL

Ethical approval is not applicable to the current study, as the data collected are unanimous and the analysis is based on the summary statistical data only.

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