



Uncertainty is Opportunity

For many organisations, times of uncertainty can provide significant opportunities. This is the moment to redefine culture, drive improved performance, and enhance customer experience.

Rather than try and wait until the problems go away, now is the time to build and implement a new playbook that adapts to and leverages the new circumstances. How leaders navigate uncertainty directly links to business performance and to the experience of stakeholders.

Here are three steps to consider if you are addressing market challenges and organisational flux:

Step 1: Focus on your personal growth and the growth of those around you

During his time as CEO and Chairman of Microsoft, Satya Nadella drove transformation and success by shifting the business and its leadership from having a “know it all” to “learn it all” mindset. The temptation in times of economic challenge can be to hunker down and stick to what you’ve always done. The opportunity, however, is to analyse ingrained processes for customer relevance and to engage team members, and where possible, customers in a community of innovation.

Change in periods of uncertainty — where it is a purposeful solution to challenges being faced — meets lower resistance. Minds are more open, the need is better understood, and the contribution of team members reflects

growth in their mindset.

Step 2: Develop change management as your core competency

Executive recruiters used to measure a factor called “Openness to Change” to evaluate a candidate’s likely ability to be able to adapt. This still has some relevance, but today we need more from leaders. The ability to live with uncertainty and ambiguity remain important, but it requires a growth mindset to interpret, understand, create a vision, and respond accurately to the multi-layered challenges leaders are being asked to address. AI, global conflicts, changing economic order, and increased supply chain complexity converge to create the perfect storm.

Moving from a fixed mindset to a growth mindset is not easy and can feel counter-intuitive. You demonstrate the latter of these when you:

- See mistakes as learning points and not catastrophes
- Recognise that when you work at a task or challenge you are already self-improving
- Can constructively criticise and receive constructive criticism
- Though objective and realistic, apply positive thought and language around your own actions and those of your team
- Persist in the face of a challenge but recognise when to pivot

Step 3: Increase communication, share purpose, and build resilience

All change provides opportunity for your team to thrive. Help and encourage them to adjust to their new reality and to what meaningful contribution each can make. Continuously repeat your messages as each member of your team will have different communication needs and process information differently. Their contribution to maximising the opportunity that uncertainty presents is vital, their blend of perspectives, ideas, and experiences can bring highly innovative process improvements, but they need to understand what meaning it serves and that it is safe to share.

The real competitive advantage is in adapting to change

Other than various forms of automation and social development, the organisation structures and systems that we work in have been the same for 200 years. Perhaps more has changed in the last 20 years than the prior 100. However, from here the evolution has become a revolution where organisations are highly digitalised, employees are deep knowledge intensive, and workplaces are wherever a valued employee chooses to be. In fact, they may not even be an employee but a service provider for a fixed term or purpose.

In an article entitled “Strengthen Your Change Muscle for Competitive Advantage,” by Gaurav Gupta, John Kotter, Vanessa Akhtar, and Nick Petschek, and appearing in MIT Sloan Management Review, the authors summarise change, how it can drive performance, and they comment that leaders in adaptive companies may seem like they are always two steps ahead, but their competency is not the ability to predict which way the wind will blow, but rather their ability to sense the prevailing winds and adapt quickly to ride with them. Uncertainty is opportunity.



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