



Spotlight

Shining a light on significant trends in management, sales and learning

Sales Professional's Toolset

Concepts, frameworks, tools to master challenges in sales and more

Skill Up

Shines light on a specific skill, you can quickly learn and put to use

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Proven learnings and best practices for mastery.

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6 Insights to Thrive on Uncertainty

Uncertainty has become an everyday reality for business and industry. Tariff wars, regional conflicts, unforeseen supply and sales disruptions, ripple effects of hostilities elsewhere in the globe are among unprecedented risks that businesses have to deal with today. Most of these problems have no immediate or easy solutions in sight. And none of them is under the control of individual enterprises. Nor are they likely to go away any time soon. The era of uncertainty is here to stay, at least in the medium term

Listed below are 6 critical insights to survive uncertainty and thrive on it, mapped out by World Economic Forum's Community of global industry strategy leaders and the pointers for sales function that we can draw from them

1. 'Today-forward' and 'future-back' thinking

"Today-forward is about improving what a company already has and does – making it faster, cheaper and more sustainable. Future-back means anticipating customer needs, new technologies and industry disruptions, and then building a business that is ready to meet them. Companies need to look past entrenched business models and invest in future capabilities" Example: People switching from owning CDs to paying for streaming services

Insight applied to sales: Questions to ask would be – (i) How can we add even more value to Customers with our current offerings which will make us trusted partners of Customers? (ii) What new practices, skills and capabilities should we bring to our sales teams to be able to meet the emerging and future needs of Customers?



2. Operating on multiple strategic tracks

Companies are now seen to be moving along multiple strategic tracks instead of relying on a single master plan. This is to address dual challenge of keeping up with fast-moving current day shifts while also getting ready for deeper structural transformation required to meet long term challenges like in-sourcing and operating with global level constraints

Insight applied to sales: Just as companies require multiple strategies, sales professionals require to broaden their range of skills. Uncertainty in the business environment and rapid changes in technology and Customer expectations have made continuous learning essential for sales professionals. As the half-life of skills shortens, the ability to reskill and upskill has become a critical driver of success.

3. Ecosystem mastery defines success

Firms are the sum of their capabilities and networks and that has become the determinant of their success. Apart from engaging in their core activities, companies have moved to building and orchestrating a ecosystem of partners, suppliers, designers and other platforms to produce goods.

Insight applied to sales: Mercuri International's Future State of Sales survey of 2025 uncovered a strong emphasis on collaboration. This means that salespeople must be capable of building an ecosystem of cross functional support that can promote a deeper and advisory engagement with Customers. Given the uncertainties with which most businesses operate today, efforts of the individual salesperson alone may not be sufficient to put together the customised solutions required by each Customer. It takes an entire ecosystem to make it possible.

4. Abandon perfection in favour of iteration

"Companies need to reframe risk as opportunity and move fast. In an ever-changing environment, waiting for a perfect set of circumstances before making a decision will create stasis." Iteration must be favoured over perfection. Ability to experiment small and pivot quickly could be vital for thriving on uncertainty

Insight applied to sales: With growing buyer expectations, sales teams must be open to experimenting with crafting creative solutions for pressing problems that Customers experience in an uncertain world. This calls for quick iterations without waiting for perfect solutions to emerge, which is the essence of action learning

5. Innovation squads and the startup advantage

Small and nimble teams are important for avoiding operational overwhelm that will come in the way of companies meeting Customer needs in these uncertain times. While startups are best placed to fit into this rubric, even big companies can create their own innovation squads that work parallelly with their core business teams to address client demands

Insight applied to sales: Creative thinking and problem-solving emerged as the fourth most important skill Mercuri International's Sales Skills Survey. For salespeople too, the ability to develop innovative ideas, solutions, and approaches to address business challenges is essential to unlock opportunities even in the face of growing uncertainties.

6. Alignment across sectors and industries will offset risk

Complications and complexity create their own opportunities. When new technologies and new geopolitical realities raise and deepen complexities, new business models and new partnerships that emerge in response, create opportunities. But for this to happen, growth will hinge on shared goals, agility, and alignment across sectors.

Insight applied to sales: As the business environment becomes more complex due to prevailing uncertainty, buyers increasingly rely on trusted advisors to navigate challenges and make informed decisions. But to deliver on this expectation, salespeople must be willing to and capable of aligning their efforts with other groups in the company who are actively involved in delivering what the Customer wants

The full length Research Insight by [Francisco Betti](#) Head, Global Industries Team; Member Executive Committee, [Gayle Markovitz](#) Head, Written and Audio Content, of World Economic Forum can be accessed [here](#)

“What ought one to say then as each hardship comes? I was practicing for this, I was training for this”

– Epictetus

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To Handle Uncertain Situations With Success Shift Between Abstract and Concrete Thinking

Being caught off guard aggravates uncertainty

Dictionary defines uncertainty as a situation in which something is not known, or certain not certain. When we are unable to anticipate and things catch us off guard, we are pushed into an uncertain situation

For example, let's say we expect to improve our market share, as we have always led the market with our product. But a new competitor who introduced a competing product has outsold us during the current quarter. That catches us by complete surprise. We wonder why we didn't see it coming

Stanford Research explains failure to anticipate with Construal Level Theory

Prof Nir Halevy of Stanford Graduate Business School with two Stanford Researchers Elizabeth Mclauopen and Serena Lee went into the question of why some unexpected events catch us off guard while others don't

Their research explains this phenomenon in terms of construal level theory. According to the construal level people represent objects and events in the world around them along a sliding scale. The scale runs from abstract to concrete. Secondly psychological distance from objects and events – temporal distance, social distance, spatial distance, and uncertainty – shifts how abstractly or concretely people think. Greater psychological distance tends to promote abstract thinking, while nearness results in concrete thinking. Both approaches have unique blind spots



Excessively Abstract or Concrete Thinking can both cause failure to anticipate

If our thinking is excessively abstract, then we apply poorly fitting mental models and misjudge possible threats and opportunities. Or we simply assume that other will behave in stereotypical ways.

Concrete thinkers, not willing to use some degree of abstraction, tend to get bogged down in small details leading to their failure to notice broad trends.

A sales head who uses only concrete thinking, for instance, may be so taken up with local market signals that he may be missing or misinterpreting broader industry patterns. On the other hand, a habitual abstract thinker may look at the historical culture of a rival company and based on this, assume its leadership will take a certain course of action that falls in line with this abstraction, which could turn out totally wrong.

Minimize strategic surprises and reduce uncertainty with two steps

So, to minimize strategic surprises and reduce uncertainty:

Gather the best available information

Consciously move your thinking between concrete and abstract frames when analyzing the information

How to toggle fluently between abstract and concrete frames – 4 Tips

Some tips on how to develop fluency in moving between abstract and concrete thinking:

Consider “why” people engage in an activity. This encourages abstract thinking,

Also think of the “how” of people and things to promote concrete thinking.

Thinking about possibilities in the more distant future engages abstract thinking

Generating ideas for the near future engages concrete thinking.

For example, when trying to anticipate a business rival’s behavior, try to think both about what they might do tomorrow as well as about what they might do next year.

You can read the [Stanford Business Graduate School Insight on Why Surprises Catch Us Off Guard here](#)

“The greatest difficulties lie where we are not
looking for them”

– Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

How to spot Hidden Opportunities for Sales Growth in Uncertain Times

When times become uncertain, we are forced to actively search for growth opportunities that we may have overlooked. We also try to get more out of all our resources, including human resources.

The story of Novartis, the global healthcare company, illustrates this. Writing for Harvard Business Review Andris A. Zoltners, Prabhakant Sinha and Sally Lorimer ([How to Spot Hidden Opportunities for Sales Growth – HBR Sept 2015](#)) recount how Novartis raised the averages for its entire sales team through a smart strategy of modelling.

The company “identified a group of salespeople who were outstanding performers and isolated a set of behaviors that differentiated their performance from that of average performers.”

Based on this Novartis developed a new sales process derived from the behaviors of the top performers that was converted into a capability enhancement training program. The training program proved to be huge success with most participants doubling their sales numbers. This encouraged Novartis to replicate the program globally

A book on tested sales strategies used by outstanding sales leaders across the world, [Sales Growth – Five Proven Strategies from the World’s Sales Leaders](#) by [Baumgartner, Hatami and Valdivieso](#) devotes an entire section for ideas on maintaining sales momentum by identifying pockets for new growth



5 Growth Digging Strategies to Work With

Here is a summary of 5 strategies adapted from these sources (HBR Insight and the book on Sales Growth) to makes sales happen when selling seems almost impossible:

Increase Sales by modelling sales excellence to raise sales momentum

One assured way to keep sales growing, is to model excellence across sales teams, as shown in the Novartis story. A phased learning path that provides for blended training interspersed with simple assessments and sharing of success practices can promote such modelling

Action Steps: (i) Identify sales behaviours of outstanding performers that differentiate them (ii) Cascade those behaviours to others through training (iii) Coach Sales Managers to manage by support to keep sales ticking. This way, we can keep the sales growing by modelling excellence across sales teams

Look for ‘hidden’ micro-markets or growth geographies buried in aggregate numbers

As data science professionals like to point out “Aggregate hides insight.” To gain insight into unspotted micro growth drivers, the strategy can be to go granular with the data. To do this, we must disaggregate sales data and analyse by picking out micromarkets with potential. When analysed like this, what looks like a mature market with plateaued sales suddenly throws up hot spots of growth

Action Steps: (i) Instead of sales by region, make sales by smaller geographies (or Micromarkets) the unit of measurement (ii) Define the right metrics and granularity for your micromarkets (iii) Determine growth potential of each micromarket (iii) Look for opportunities– In terms of prospects, new Customer segments or micro growth segments (iv) Determine your share in each micromarket and understand the root causes for variance in market share

Grow additional sales from products within a portfolio using data

A simple 4-step process is suggested for this. The idea behind the process is to assess which of the products within a portfolio, bring the highest value of sales in return for the sales effort invested and make them the growth engines

Action Steps: (i) Measure salesperson's time invested per product for all products in a portfolio (A) (ii) Get the product wise sales numbers (B) (iii) Arrive at the Return on Sales Time Invested per product ($C = B/A$) (iv) Allocate more sales time for products with higher C quotient. This focus can be further refined through a comparison of profits generated by top products enjoying the biggest C quotient numbers

Support micromarket sales effort cross-functionally and intensify cross sell

We need to ensure that adequate organisational resources are assigned to prioritised growth pockets

Action Steps: (i) Strengthen cross functional support from Marketing, Customer Service, Supply Chain, Finance to identified micromarkets (ii) Sensitize all support functions to accord priority to growth pockets (iii) Challenge micromarkets salespeople to raise their bar (iv) Intensify cross sell to Customers from growth pocket geographies who approach with service or support requests

Keep it simple for sales

Make data collection, reporting and use, simple for sales teams to work with

Action Steps: (i) Minimise complexity. It is easy to be carried away by appetite for data, raising the workload for frontline sales (ii) Ensure insights and tools are simple to understand and use (iii) Implement an easy-to-understand dashboard presenting all micromarkets together (iv) Explore feasibility of differential, potential based pricing exclusively for micromarkets

These strategies, essentially derive from piece of timeless wisdom known to all successful entrepreneurs. That opportunities multiply for those who look for them!

“Do you know how to make God laugh? Tell him your plans.”

— Yiddish Joke

5 Ways to Drive Bold Action Amid Uncertainty

In Oct 2025, the editors of Harvard Business Review curated what they described as their favourite tips on leading through and managing uncertainty. The compilation of seven articles covered themes ranging from how to become a more courageous leader to how to communicate with your team when times are tough. Among chosen classics is an article on [Now Is the Time to for Courage by Ranjay Gulati Professor of Business Administration at Harvard Business School](#). It offers nuggets of wisdom that can call up the courage required to build business and sell in these uncertain times

Research by Professors Ranjay Gulati, Nitin Nohria and Franz Wohlgezogen during the 2008 financial crisis, on how some 4,700 public companies had navigated the three previous recessions, it was found that about 9% of these companies were able to emerge stronger than before. This was not only because they managed costs better but also because they simultaneously took calculated risks to invest in growth.

Drawing on insights distilled from years of academic research and real time surveys, Prof Gulati lists 5 ways in which leaders can drive action even in conditions heavily laden with uncertainty



1. Create a positive narrative – The stories we tell ourselves and share with our teams become the beacons that hold up spirits and spark courageous action. Reframing uncertainty through positive narratives involves (i) Spotting and converting the fear of the unknown into risks that are clearly described through collection and analysis of data, (ii) Framing the situation in terms of a higher purpose and (iii) Calling upon one’s faith

2. Cultivate confidence – Capability building instils confidence in one’s ability to weather challenges. Competence and skill in any domain inspire motivation to work on big, bold goals even in adverse conditions. Three actions help achieve this state: (i) Train deliberately and train all the time (ii) Assemble a large tool kit of proven practices and frameworks (iii) Focus on what’s in your control

3. Take small steps – This is at the heart of learning through action. Prof Gulati refers to a strategy that Karl Weick calls sensemaking. Taking small steps to sense one’s way opens us to possibilities and a clear path emerges as we proceed. Sense making through small moves has 3 components: (i) Evaluate the situation dispassionately, devoid of emotions (ii) Let meaning emerge, without seeking to understand everything immediately (iii) Interpret in motion, making sense based on an action and result feedback loop

4. Find connection – (i) Turn to trusted allies for inspirational support (ii) Access all resources you have built over time (iii) Accept feedback to refine and improve your strategies

5. Stay calm – The state of unruffled calm and constant courage can be attained through (i) Healthy self-care practices (ii) Positive rituals reinforcing confidence (iii) Reframing the situation through a redefinition of what uncertainty means for you and your organization in the long term

Build confidence deliberately. Competence builds courage. Study best practices until they become instinctive, expand your problem-solving toolkit, and focus on what you can control. The more prepared and grounded you are, the easier it is to take bold, self-assured steps.

This captures the quintessence of Mercuri’s Managing by Support framework for sales leaders. Managing by Support enjoins the Sales Manager to simultaneously use the available resources well to achieve results of today, such as conquering day to day uncertainties. It also expects them to develop those resources for results of tomorrow that will usher a brighter future for all

"Rules are not the fetters of genius. They are the fetters of men with no genius"

– Joshua Reynolds, Painter

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When weather becomes climate: Two contrasting ways to cope with a TUNA world

It's a TUNA world now characterised by Turbulence, Uncertainty, Novelty and Ambiguity. Day on day, the uncertainties and turbulence only seem to increase with most challenges being novel, newly experienced for the first time with solution options that seem ambiguous. Uncertainty seems to be turning into the only certainty as bad weather becomes the climate prevailing every day

Idea Watch explores two contrasting strands of ideas in coping with this constant uncertainty

Idea 1: Preparedness Beats Prediction: Morgan Housel's prescription in his book "Same as Ever"

Below are edited excerpts from [Morgan Housel's Same as Ever](#) explaining why preparation is better than prediction of uncertainty and risk. Housel's prescription is built around two axioms – (i) All risks cannot be reliably foreseen or forecasted (ii) Real serious risks are often those we don't see

Two things can get us moving in a helpful direction.



Anticipating all possible risks is preferable to forecasting them – Think of risk the way the State of California thinks of earthquakes. Buildings are designed to withstand earthquakes that may not occur for a century or more. Many other such earthquake safety measures are instituted. And all that is done for something that may not happen. As Nassim Taleb says, "Invest in preparedness, not in prediction." That gets to the heart of it.

Risk is dangerous when you think it requires a specific forecast before you start preparing for it. It's better to have expectations that risk will arrive, though you don't know when or where, than to rely exclusively on forecasts almost all of which are either nonsense or about things that are well-known.

Real serious risks are those we can't see – Realize that if you're preparing only for the risks you can envision, you'll be unprepared for the risks you can't see every single time. Your preparation may not make sense in a world where the biggest historical events would have sounded absurd before they happened. Yet preparation is the key to living through uncertainty

Idea 2 – Assess What is Certain in a Sea of Uncertainties: Cynthia Selin in MIT Sloan Management Review

The Winter 2026 issue of [MIT Sloan Management Review](#) themed around [The Uncertainty Opportunity](#), features an article by Cynthia Selin, Strategy Consultant and associate fellow in University of Oxford's Said Business School which argues that strategizing in an uncertain environment requires both anticipating what may change and recognizing what will remain constant.

Select nuggets from the article, highlighting this approach to coping with uncertainty together with our suggestions on how they connect to sales and service:

Strategic acumen lies not only in anticipating what will change but in recognising what won't

People tend to overfocus on uncertainties and gloss over certainties

Certainties are "pre-determined elements" that are already in motion and likely to unfold regardless of other uncertainties

Knowing what you can count on is as important as navigating what is messy and in flux

Certainties can be understood as boundary conditions, which set limits on what is possible in the fact of uncertainty

5 Lenses of Certainty are:

Material and Physical – Available infrastructure, location, natural resources are examples

Knowledge and expert driven – Institutional knowledge, expertise of employees can be counted here

Temporal and path dependent – Business models adopted, technology and processes deployed are instances of past influencing present and future. Here temporal refers to time and these certainties set the enterprise on path that is not easy to change

Political and economic – Even when external or oversea geopolitical upheavals can bring uncertainty, local regulations, policies and markets usually present certainties that can be relied upon for scenario planning

Normative and cultural – Organisational values, ethos and culture come under these certainties. If Customer intimacy defines a company, it is something of a given even in the midst of uncertainties. Hotels known for the guest centricity continued to put their guests first even during the pandemic

The goal is to identify certainties relevant to the decision on hand

Some certainties need to be defended. Some may have to be dismantled

Strategic failure is often the result of misjudging what's fixed and what's flexible, assuming freedom where there are constraints or imagining rigidity where adaptation is possible

Where to apply this framework

In a sales context, this framework can be extremely valuable in taking strategic decisions such as expansion of territory, increasing the headcount, investing in sales tech or even in scaling down coverage areas or pruning the product portfolio, especially when the business environment is riddled with uncertainty

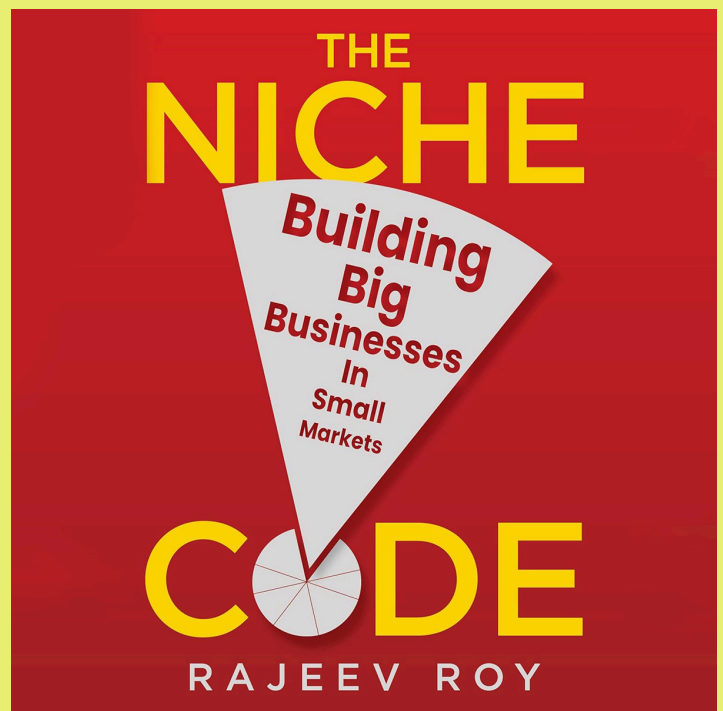
"Rules are not the fetters of genius. They are the fetters of men with no genius"

– Joshua Reynolds, Painter

The Niche Code by Rajeev Roy

There are books that are machines to think with, as Ivor Richards described them. And there are others that are tools to work with. [The Niche Code by Rajeev Roy](#) belongs to the latter category. The promise of the code is in the subtitle of the book – Building big businesses in small markets. In periods of uncertainty, markets get smaller in size, but sales still have to grow. Finding niches where growth can continue is one strategy that can help. The Niche Code lays out a banquet of ideas to choose from in discovering, nurturing and growing niches

India, as the introduction points out, is a niche maker's dream come true, thanks to the complexity, diversity and fragmentation of the markets. Roy builds on this theme spotlighting places where you can look for great niche ideas, including underserved communities, emerging habits and hybrid markets. In describing who the book is meant for, Roy lists those who work in large organisations. Says Roy: "... this book will help you spot new growth opportunities that your competitors can't see. It will help you innovate from the edges, not the centre," a lens that's likely to be valuable for sales professionals



The book is arranged in 4 sections – Why, Who, How, and What next. A niche, according to Roy, is not a mere market subset. It is a focused intentional space built around specific unmet needs and deep Customer understanding. The Who section traces the contours and many shapes of a typical niche. Consider the case of a pet food maker in a metro city whose story illustrates how niches work. Pet food is a fiercely competed space. Yet the company in question found an untapped sales opportunity among the affluent who adore their dogs and regard them as family. In selling fresh, organic, handcrafted dog food, the company built an enduring market with the high-income pet owners.

The Niche Code uses success stories to derive lessons and insights from which it builds frameworks for making the most of niches. Under the Who Section, there are details of how to spot a perfect niche and choosing a niche that works. The How section, that would be most helpful to promoters of new enterprises, discusses niche product strategies, approaches to branding, pricing and perception and choosing the channels that make niches work. The final section deals with the path followed by niche brands in going mainstream and where niches are headed next

For a sales professional the 8 frameworks Roy lists to spot a niche could provide actionable ideas to "hunt for the unseen" opportunities to maintain sales momentum in uncertain demand conditions. A quick listing of the 8 frameworks – (1) Unmet needs (2) Underserved communities or buyer groups (3) Emerging trends, which can be tech or cultural shifts (4) Needs of specialised skill practitioners or passion enthusiasts (5) Geographic niches or micromarkets (6) Value based niches aligned to lifestyle beliefs (7) Price based niches, viz., ultra-premium and ultra affordable (8) Hybrid niches, combining some or many of these elements.

As one of the reviewers has observed: "Niche is a powerful, often overlooked strategy for all businesses, big and small ... and this book tells you how to go about it"

Author Information: Rajeev Roy is an IIM Ahmedabad alumnus who is an educator, entrepreneurship evangelist and start-up mentor actively involved in varied entrepreneurship development activities with governments, educational institutions, incubators and accelerators in several geographies across Asia and the Americas. Currently he is Director First Bridge Business School, Gurugram

"When the winds of change blow, some people build walls and others build windmills."

— Chinese Proverb

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"Ever since I hacked into that retail group, I can't get off its mailing list."

John Klossner



“He escaped out the window. Next time don’t leave the room after showing the patient the bill.”

"Being anticipatory is to help make better decisions today in relation to tomorrow's possible futures"

– Roger Spitz