

# Board Perspectives

ISSUE 187

## The Upside of Uncertainty: Seizing Opportunities Amid a Global Structural Shift

*This month, Protiviti launches Board Perspectives in a new format: one that eyes the unique challenges boards face through a C-suite lens. In this first installment, Board Perspectives welcomes Heidi Crebo-Rediker, a senior fellow at the Center for Geoeconomic Studies at the Council on Foreign Relations, to discuss risk, resiliency and the upside of uncertainty. Protiviti Managing Director Matt Moore, Global Risk & Compliance lead, sits down with Crebo-Rediker, who served as the State Department's first Chief Economist and as a member of the World Economic Forum's Global Agenda Council. Their conversation is available as both a [video Q&A](#) and a [podcast](#).*

The world, of course, is a vastly different place than it was just a few months ago. In 2025, unique challenges have surfaced for businesses, including the moving targets of tariffs and trade wars, as well as economic uncertainty and geopolitical risk. "This is a different kind of beast," says Crebo-Rediker. "We are in the midst of a global realignment of both the economic and the national security infrastructures."

In this rapidly changing environment, how can business leaders and boards best position their companies to take on, and take advantage of, all this uncertainty?



Heidi Crebo-Rediker is a senior fellow in the Center for Geoeconomic Studies at the Council on Foreign Relations, specializing in international political economy, economic competitiveness, economic security and global finance. She previously served as the State Department's first Chief Economist and as a member of the World Economic Forum's Global Agenda Council on the United States. She was recently named in *The Wall Street Journal* Top 25 Women in Business.

### Navigating uncertainty: Overcoming strategic inertia

One thing that should be evident in boardrooms and C-suites by now, Crebo-Rediker says, is that where we are today is not just another economic cycle to be ridden out; it is a significant structural shift on a global front defined by:

- Lower growth, higher inflation and greater volatility.
- Shifts in global trade flows, investment strategies and geopolitical alliances.
- A remaking of the rules underpinning the post-World War II global economic and security architectures.

“One of the biggest threats to companies right now is strategic inertia,” Crebo-Rediker says. “If you wait for clarity in a world that is defined by ambiguity, you will get blindsided with all risk and no opportunity.” That is the worst place you could end up, she says.

### The upside of uncertainty: Bridges, not battlegrounds

As realignment happens all over the world, boards should be looking at how additional countries and neutral geographies, even ones that have been outside of their companies’ traditional strategic landscape, can be bridges, not battlegrounds.

One such area of opportunity is in Europe, where there are indications of one of the most consequential shifts we have seen in its investment landscape, Crebo-Rediker says.

- **Europe’s pivot:** Europe is increasing defense budgets and public investments in energy, digital infrastructure and green transitions. These efforts aim to catalyze private capital, presenting a “once-in-a-generation” opportunity for businesses.
- **Global talent capture:** Europe is actively seeking to attract U.S. science and technology talent, reflecting its focus on innovation.

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Europe, as well as Japan and South Korea, will undergo broad reconfiguration to form new global partnerships, such as free trade agreements with India or joining trade agreements like the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), Crebo-Rediker says. “I think we are going to see global trade relationships completely reconfigured ... and it’ll happen quickly.”

### Seizing opportunities: New markets and services

Those reconfigured relationships present all sorts of possibilities for new and enhanced revenue streams in both emerging and developed markets, including:

- **Expansion into emerging markets:** Tailoring products to meet the needs and preferences of consumers in emerging markets can open new revenue possibilities.
- **Infrastructure development:** In both emerging and developed markets, significant public investment in infrastructure is expected.
- **Localizing operations and products:** Adapting products and services to align with local cultures and preferences could enhance profitability.

Additionally, there will be new revenue opportunities in specific services, industries and operations, such as:

- **Diversification of supply chains:** Organizations will develop more resilient and flexible supply chain models to avoid a reliance on single markets.
- **Investment in renewable energy:** There is a global push — mostly outside the U.S. — toward accelerating investments in renewable energy sources.
- **Strategic acquisitions:** Market volatility might lower the valuation of potential acquisition targets.

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- **Financial and professional services:** More volatility in local markets could mean increased demand for risk management and financial advisory services.

### **Risk management: Steps and missteps**

Traditional risk management strategies that companies have relied on for decades may no longer suffice, Crebo-Rediker says. To this end, the board should be thinking a few steps ahead to future-proof their company, including:

- Building resilience and agility into operations, ensuring they are prepared for rapid changes in global trade, economic policies and geopolitical dynamics.
- Integrating geopolitical risk into strategic planning rather than treating it as an isolated factor.
- Adopting dynamic capabilities, such as scenario planning, to navigate volatility more effectively.
- Investing in intelligence functions. Companies should actively shape their operating environments through intelligence gathering and foresight.
- Playing the long game. Organizations should not react too quickly to external events and should stay strategic and methodical in their thinking.

“One big misstep I see is approaching the basket of geopolitical risk outside of the core commercial planning,” Crebo-Rediker says. “Businesses that approach geopolitical risk in isolation from core commercial planning are making a huge mistake.”

And consideration of geopolitical risk must be a cross-company effort, she says. “It can’t be one or two people sitting in a legal office coming up with a few scenarios.”

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Another critical misstep business leaders make, she says, is overreacting. “Don’t rush to exit markets like China or the U.S. when a more calibrated presence could open up long-term opportunities,” Crebo-Rediker says.

“The firms that are best positioned are the ones that are going to be doubling down on the scenario planning and investing in intelligence and foresight functions to actively shape the environments in which they operate,” she adds.

### Protiviti’s POV

Amid all this uncertainty, Protiviti’s Matt Moore says the strategic choices businesses make now will go a long way to determining success or failure. To that end, here are five steps boards should be taking today:

- Ensure all **opportunities receive sufficient attention** in strategic planning and risk assessments, including those created by global geopolitical changes.
- Increase the usage of **forecasting practices**, such as horizon scanning and scenario analysis, to analyze potential outcomes.
- Continue and even **accelerate infrastructure modernization** (technology, data, operations) to enable agility to capitalize on opportunities and resilience to navigate shifting business conditions.
- **Remain hypervigilant** protecting the franchise. Be sure cyber-threat capabilities, risk management and control environment remain fit for purpose.

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## Meet our team



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