

# CHINA CROSSROADS

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## Uncertain Horizons and the Failure of Business Planning: Adopting an "Unwritten Playbook" for Success

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We were trained to believe that strategy means clarity, stability, and five-year roadmaps. But what if the very idea of a stable horizon has become obsolete? In today's world—where geopolitics reshapes markets overnight, technology compresses decades into months, and regulation follows innovation rather than leading it—the future refuses to sit still. We are witnessing the quiet collapse of medium-term planning. Not because leaders lack intelligence or discipline, but because the environment no longer rewards rigidity. The institutions, companies and even individuals that struggle most are often those with the most detailed plans. This talk challenges a deeply rooted assumption: that certainty is the foundation of strategy. Instead, I will argue that uncertainty is now the operating system. The real advantage lies in directional clarity without fixed destinations, in building organizations—and careers—that are designed to pivot rather than predict. In a moment when China itself stands at multiple crossroads—economic, technological, geopolitical—the question is not “What is the five-year plan?” but “How fast can we adjust when the horizon moves again?” The unwritten playbook is not about chaos. It is about mastering motion.

[Roberto Donà](#) is Professor of Practice in Management at IBSS, the business school of Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University in Suzhou, where he serves also a Director of the Master of Science in Management. He is also Honorary Professor at School of Innovation and Entrepreneurship of University of Chinese Academy of Science and Adjunct Professor at MIP Politecnico di Milano Graduate School of Business. Previously he has been a faculty member of SDA Bocconi School of Management and Bocconi University since 1990, Visiting Scholar (1996) and Visiting Professor (1998) at Stern School of Business (New York University) and Visiting Professor at Fudan University School of Management (2008-2010). Roberto has a strong international exposure having worked in Russia, Bulgaria, Argentina, USA and China. His fields of interested are on Internationalization and Innovation Processes in Asia and their managerial implications. At the start of his career, he also worked also as management consultant for both domestic and international companies serving in several board positions. He is also the First President of the Association of the Italian Scholars in China (AAIIC).

*[China Crossroads](#) hosts talks on all topics related to China, including business, foreign policy, and other areas as they relate to China, the idea being that China is both already a “crossroads” of the world and itself at a “crossroads” in terms of its future global influence. For more information, contact Frank Tsai at [editor@shanghai-review.org](mailto:editor@shanghai-review.org).*