



Rita McGrath

AUTHOR

Strategy frameworks built for stable industries become a liability when markets are not. The assumption that the objective is to build and protect durable competitive advantage leads organisations to misread the early signals of their own erosion. The real problem is not disruption: it is the absence of a disciplined process for recognising when an advantage has peaked, and moving before the market forces a worse decision.

Columbia Business School professor and Thinkers50's #1-ranked strategy thinker Rita Gunther McGrath gives organisations the frameworks to compete when competitive advantage is transient; replacing the doctrine of sustainable advantage with a practical operating system for growth under uncertainty.

Rita McGrath's 2026 Biography

Why organisations work with Rita McGrath

- The transient advantage framework directly challenges an assumption most leadership teams still operate on: that the goal of strategy is to build and protect durable competitive positions. McGrath makes the cost of that assumption explicit, and offers a named, practitioner-tested alternative.
- Discovery-driven planning, co-created with Ian C. MacMillan and introduced through the Harvard Business Review, gives organisations a structured methodology for committing to uncertain growth initiatives: one that Clayton Christensen described as among the most important management tools ever developed.
- She holds the Thinkers50 #1 Strategy Award (2013) alongside four subsequent Thinkers50 Strategy Awards and a 2025 global ranking of #6, a record of credentials in strategy thinking that is without parallel on the conference circuit.
- Her *Seeing Around Corners* framework provides a concrete vocabulary for the specific problem boards face most acutely: detecting the leading indicators of strategic inflection before they become corporate crises.
- As a regular HBR contributor whose work is cited in the FT, WSJ, and New York Times, her ideas arrive in board rooms before she does: senior audiences already speak her language.

Biography highlights

- Professor of Management and Academic Director in Executive Education, Columbia Business School; leads *Leading Strategic Growth and Change* executive programme
- Thinkers50 Distinguished Achievement Award in Strategy (2013); five-

AVAILABLE FOR

- After Dinner Engagement
- Panel Participation
- Speaking
- Training and Workshops

RITA'S SPEAKING THEMES

- Business Strategy & Growth
- Change Management
- Innovation & Disruption
- Organizational Agility
- Scenario Planning & Strategic Foresight

LANGUAGES: English

time Thinkers50 Strategy Award winner; ranked #6 globally on the Thinkers50 overall list (2025)

- C.K. Prahalad Award (2022), Strategic Management Society: awarded for scholarly impact on practice; inducted into the Business Excellence Hall of Fame (2022)
- Author of five books including *The End of Competitive Advantage* (HBR Press) and *Seeing Around Corners* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt); *Discovery-Driven Growth* named to Thinkers50 Management Classics Booklist
- Co-creator of discovery-driven planning, introduced through the Harvard Business Review (1995); cited by Clayton Christensen as among the most important management and strategy tools ever developed
- Ph.D., Wharton School (University of Pennsylvania); honours degrees from Barnard College and Columbia School of International and Public Affairs
- Work covered by the Wall Street Journal, Financial Times, New York Times, CNN Business, and NPR Marketplace; one of HBR's most frequent contributors

Biography

Competitive advantage used to be the organising idea behind business strategy. Build it, protect it, sustain it. In markets defined by rapid technology cycles, boundary-free competition, and compressing product lifecycles, that idea has become a liability, and most organisations do not realise it until the decision has already been made for them.

Rita Gunther McGrath has spent three decades at Columbia Business School building the alternative. Her framework of transient advantage, set out in *The End of Competitive Advantage*, argues that the objective of strategy must shift from sustaining positions to developing the organisational capacity to find, exploit, and exit advantages on the organisation's own terms. Discovery-driven planning provides the operational methodology: a structured process for committing to growth initiatives under uncertainty without betting the business on invalid assumptions.

Her intellectual standing in strategy is well-documented. Thinkers50 awarded her the #1 Strategy Award in 2013 and has continued to recognise her work across four subsequent award cycles, ranking her sixth globally in 2025. The Strategic Management Society's C.K. Prahalad Award (2022) recognised her scholarly impact on practice, a distinction that acknowledges both rigour and application. Clayton Christensen placed her discovery-driven growth tools among the most important management tools ever developed.

McGrath directs Columbia's *Leading Strategic Growth and Change* executive programme and founded Valize, a platform that operationalises the discovery-driven methodology for organisations at scale. Her advisory work runs into the C-suites of Fortune 1,000 companies: helping boards and senior leadership teams navigate the specific transition her research describes: from the strategy they were trained to run, to one that fits the market they are actually in.

Key speaking topics

- Transient advantage and the limits of competitive positioning
- Strategic inflection points and early warning signals

- Discovery-driven planning and growth under uncertainty
- Business model evolution and renewal
- Organisational agility in volatile markets
- Strategic decision-making under ambiguity
- Innovation as a managed, repeatable discipline

Ideal for

- CEOs, CSOs, and board members wrestling with strategy refresh in disrupted or fast-moving sectors
- Strategy and corporate development teams whose existing planning frameworks are producing diminishing returns
- Senior leadership teams in large incumbents facing the transition from mature to declining competitive positions
- Executive education participants on leadership programmes where strategic thinking is the primary development objective

Audience outcomes

- A clear understanding of why durable competitive advantage is an increasingly dangerous strategic objective, and what to replace it with
- Practical command of the discovery-driven planning process for evaluating and resourcing uncertain growth initiatives
- A named framework for identifying strategic inflection points before they become visible to the wider market
- Language and tools to initiate an honest internal conversation about which parts of the current business model are in decline
- Sharpened criteria for strategic resource allocation when outcomes cannot be forecast with confidence

Rita McGrath's 2026 talks & topics

Seeing Around Corners

How leaders can identify strategic inflection points early and position their organisations to act before change becomes disruption.

Key takeaways:

- How inflection points develop gradually before accelerating, and why the gradual phase is the actionable one
- Specific lenses for detecting early signals of strategic change in markets, technology, and customer behaviour
- How to structure decision-making and resource allocation ahead of confirmed market shifts

The End of Competitive Advantage, and the New Strategy Playbook

The case for abandoning the doctrine of sustainable competitive advantage and the practical framework

that replaces it.

Key takeaways:

- Why the foundational assumption of traditional strategy (build and protect durable advantage) is empirically wrong in volatile markets
 - The transient advantage framework: how to find, scale, exploit, and exit advantages on your own terms
 - How organisations structured for exploitation fail at exploration, and the design changes that address it
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Discovery-Driven Planning

A disciplined methodology for committing to uncertain growth initiatives without exposing the organisation to the cost of invalid assumptions.

Key takeaways:

- Why conventional financial planning is the wrong tool for uncertain growth and innovation decisions
 - The five-step discovery-driven process: how to test assumptions before committing resources
 - How to apply the methodology to new ventures, M&A, and innovation portfolios
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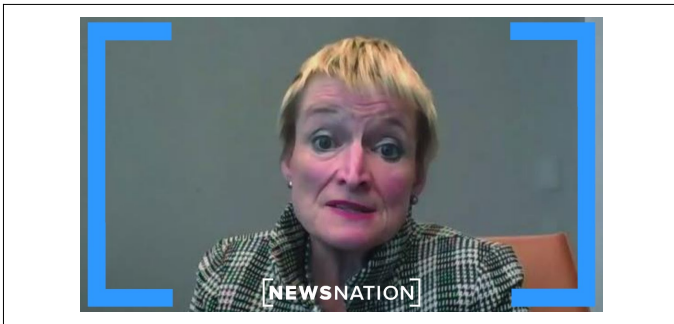
The Permissionless Organisation

Why pushing decision rights to the edges of the organisation enables faster execution in complex environments.

Key takeaways:

- How centralised approval structures create systematic strategic lag
- The organisational conditions (not just the cultural ones) required for permissionless action to work safely
- How to redesign accountability frameworks without sacrificing governance

Rita McGrath's Videos



What Rita McGrath's clients say

Your insight generated great engagement and comments from leaders sharing eye-opening observations and building on your examples throughout. You delivered the inspiration and illustration desired and it was exactly the right focus and challenge for this team. The futurefocus theme was the perfect close to our leadership summit.

Rui Barbas
CSO, Nestle

The fact that we ran over and had to forcibly eject our guests is reflective of how engaging the conversation was at the event. I can't thank you enough.

Columbia Media Lab

You know a presentation was good when you can't wait to get back to work and make some changes

DigitalNow Conference

Rita's keen insights into strategy building – and avoiding creative destruction – were a perfect fit with our conference focus.

Coca-Cola Enterprises

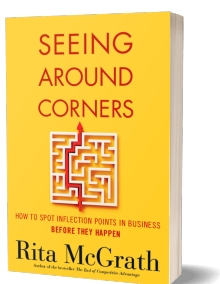
Rita did a great job of getting her message across in 45 minutes. She speaks from her heart and does not use notes. It was no surprise that Rita's presentation ranked highest of all external speakers.

Leading Hotels of the World

An exceptional instructor, Rita has the ability to take complex topics and make them understandable and applicable.

Pearson

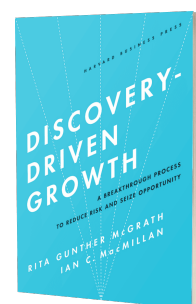
RITA'S LATEST BOOKS



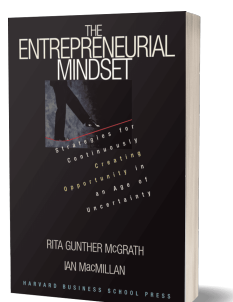
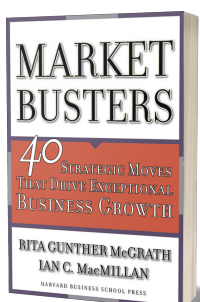
Seeing Around Corners



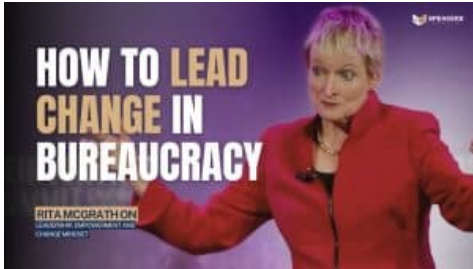
The End of Competitive Advantage



Discovery-Driven Growth



ARTICLES AND PODCASTS



Leadership, Empowerment & Change Mindset



Modern Organizational Design & Agility



Strategic Inflection Points & Proactive Change



Small Countries, Ecosystems & Infrastructure



Future of Work, Talent & Education



Practical Tools, Frameworks & Learning Loops

Rita McGrath's 2026 speaking fees

Specific fees fall within the ranges shown. These are presented as a guide only and are subject to change without notice.

	EUR	GBP	USD
Home Country	€40000 to €90000	£35,001 - £75,000	\$50000 - \$100000
Asia Pacific	€90000 plus	£75,000 plus	\$100000 plus
Europe	€90000 plus	£75,000 plus	\$100000 plus
Middle East & Africa	€90000 plus	£75,000 plus	\$100000 plus
South America	€90000 plus	£75,000 plus	\$100000 plus
United Kingdom	€40000 to €90000	£35,001 - £75,000	\$50000 - \$100000
US East Coast	€40000 to €90000	£35,001 - £75,000	\$50000 - \$100000
US West Coast	€40000 to €90000	£35,001 - £75,000	\$50000 - \$100000
Virtual	€12000 to €40000	£10,001 - £35,000	\$15000 - \$50000