

[INTRO]

Great players,
wrong game

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It's an exciting mess

It's a new world out there. You'll realize this truth if you open the windows of your organization and let in the sun. (You'd be surprised how many companies are run with the windows closed or with some sort of shutters, just to avoid this pernicious flow of sunlight.)

The current organizational climate is very different from the one of just a few years ago. This should be stating the obvious and shouldn't need any explanation. But many of the changes and their impact have come to us at the

speed of light – for a great part thanks to technology - compared to other economic, technological and political changes of the past. These days, people sometimes seem to be caught between the realization of the change and the semi-automatic reaction, all at once, all in one afternoon. This speed of changes has left us little time to reflect. The new has taken over in the blink of an eye, erasing the memory of the old almost instantly.

'The world is flat' (and wireless). Globalization - or just regionalization - has changed the rules of the game. You are now competing with everybody else. Your website, online shop, corporate e-brochure and blog are open to the world, not just to those you would like to be the readers. The world is digital, it is an e-world; whether you want it to be or not. Distance has ended. Now, the distance between you and your next-door neighbour is the same as the distance between you in London and somebody in New Zealand. Pace is up. Not only computers run faster, but many companies do as well, as shown by their life cycles. Whether you're an employer or an employee, I'm sure you can add many other things to the list: things that you're now taking for granted as 'the reality'; things you don't question anymore and about which you no longer talk in the future tense. In fact, anybody who says, "*In future, we should do so and so*", is probably referring to something that should have happened yesterday.

This world is also tricking us. Nothing is what it seems or what it used to be. Heathrow airport is not an airport. It is a large shopping mall with external roads

where airplanes come and go at regular intervals. The airport's revenues from retail vastly outweigh income from airline traffic, so this is not just a figure of speech. Newspapers are not papers with news, but pages filled with adverts leaving some spaces for news. Some street newspapers (distributed on the streets or the underground) are free. Eventually all newspapers will be free. It's all different and messy and a bit chaotic. But it has never been more exciting to work in organizations - business or non-profit, public or private - because everything is constantly reinventing itself. You can also add your own list of things that make running your business or working in an organization a very different affair when compared to the past. As I said above, this past is also shrinking. Just a few years ago, for example, we used to say that companies could no longer offer lifetime employment as they did with our parents. This statement itself is now already archaic. Nothing is as it used to be, even when we compare it to ourselves working in an organization just a few years ago, let alone with our parents.

Sorry, say again, what game?

Having agreed that this is indeed a different game, the next question is: what kind of new skills and/or 'new people' are needed for this completely different story? Over the last few years, organizations may have done well in preparing their people, developing skills and competencies, and building their own pool of 'key talent', as people like to call it these days. The football players are strong, well cared

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for, well-trained, well-dressed and well paid. One day, they run through the tunnel onto the pitch, with all the new hires in line and all their new gear, the excitement, the energy and the absolute will to win... only to find that the pitch is a basketball court. Great players, wrong game (or great game, wrong players)! This is my two-second diagnosis of many organizations where I am called in to help as an organizational consultant.

An alien just landed from Mars would be forgiven to think that there is an epidemic of blindness in many of these organizations. On one hand, there is an acknowledgement of the 'big changes occurring' but on the other hand, there is little change in the hiring practices, the organizational architecture or the development of people and skills. We carry on looking for the same sort of people, preferably somebody who 'has done it' before somewhere else. 'Somebody with experience'... that is: another great football coach to launch into the basketball court.

In the now ancient re-engineering era, the following joke was often heard. Joe had just been fired after 18 years of service. A manager says to that: "*There goes Joe... just made redundant, eighteen years of experience out the window.*" To which the re-engineering consultant replies: "*There goes Joe... just made redundant, one year of experience repeated eighteen times.*" Despite many toxic aspects of the re-engineering era, there is some truth to the joke. The only problem is that that assessment could also be applied to Mary and Peter and George who stayed in the

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organization. The re-engineering movement did not direct people to the basketball court; it only reduced the number of stewards, cleaners and bar attendants on the old football pitch.

A thousand HR departments can be wrong

Look at the recruitment ads in the personnel sections of major newspapers, including the specialized business ones. Compare them with those of ten or five years ago and spot the difference. Can you? I can't. Ok, there are exceptions, but the average company still asks for experience in the same (or similar) industry, for analytical skills and communication skills, for good team players, etc. Most of those adverts also have a computer-generated feel to them. They come with an enormous sense of 'me too'. I don't know whether, as people say, a thousand monkeys can't be wrong, but I do know that a thousand HR departments, recruiting managers or CEOs can definitely be wrong. The only social proof offered by these adverts is the proof of inertia.

As I mentioned before, there is a tremendous contradiction between what we say about how things have changed and the kind of people that we want to have around. These people are mainly a bit like us, maybe with more experience, and above all, they give us a sense of comfort. In my work with organizations, I have wished many times that my client had the courage to bring in

completely different people, with skills somewhere in the antipodal region of the current skill set. But this usually proves to be a tough one.

Reboot, please

Some organizations also seem to be stuck. They are stuck on processes and systems that 'ensure consistency'. They are stuck on traditional people development practices. They are stuck on the same language as years ago, which, incidentally, is pretty much the same language their competitors use. And they are stuck with lots of process junkies on the payroll. In reality, talking about organizational renewal or transformation in some of these companies only means to change the oil of the machinery to make sure that the machinery works faster, that the company has new machine-operators and that machine systems have been divided into Machine Business Units. It is going from 'me-too' to a 'better-me-too'; benchmarked, above average, a little ahead of competitors, or simply 'not too bad'.

But it seems to me that there is only one option when the company and its machine operators are organizationally and mentally stuck. It is similar to when your computer crashes: you have many applications open, they don't want to close down, nothing seems to move, you can't navigate between windows and you have tried control-alt-delete with no effect. The only solution at that point is that little button which - when pressed for three seconds -

will conveniently send the whole thing straight to darkness first and then into a new sunrise. It is called 'reboot'. In many cases, we need organizational rebooting, not renewal practices. And you need people with the skills to find the reboot/reset button and the guts to press it.

Alternative skills

This book does not attempt to re-define leadership or explore all possible leadership skills needed for your organization. It shows you an alternative set of skills and competencies - which I have loosely called 'new kinds of people' - that can generate a greater success for your company. Many of these share overlapping skills or mental models. But I have split them up to focus each of them on a 'desperate new skill'.

You may have noticed in the subtitle of the book that I suggest you should search for these people, seduce them, hire them and give them a job. Yes, the sequence is counterintuitive to normal practice, where you first define the existence of a 'job' (to serve 'a role') and then you launch the quest. This is old football pitch practice. Your desire for these people should be and feel so desperate that you should start looking for them now, even if you don't have 'the headcount'. If you wait to fill in John's post when John has left, you have a high probability of hiring John-2. Your HR department (if you have one), your leaders, your colleagues, your associates and even you must be in a

permanent state of scouting for these rare species. 'Creating a headcount' for them must become priority number one.

The 13th type

As for seducing, this is the right word, as attracting and convincing are not enough. These people are vital to the new organization; to this new, flat, wireless, fast, ephemeral, no-distance world. With them, you have a chance to navigate it successfully and thrive. It doesn't matter whether you run a big global organization, a division, a medium-sized enterprise or a small one. You need these skills now. You may need them in different doses. If you are lucky enough to have some - or plenty - of these people around, you are in better shape than many others.

These people are also priceless. Make sure that you provide them with the space to breed, even if your own skill set is different and you have won many football matches in the past. In fact, you - manager, CEO, head of HR, chairman of the board, section head, team leader or business owner - are the 13th type: a leader who understands this messy, crazy environment full of possibilities and whose role it is to seduce those 'new people' and to support them within the organization. You may or may not share some of the characteristics of the other 12, but you will be a 'new leader' in your own right if you accept two things: 1) that these types are far from conventional and 2) that precisely because of this you must take on the challenge and give them a space. Simply put,

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you may not be like them, but if you have the guts to embrace those skills and those people - some of them unconventional, exceptional, unusual, 'un-manageable' or even scary by your traditional standards - you are a step ahead!

If - as it has been said many times - insanity is to carry on doing the same things and expect different results, it must surely also be to perpetuate the same old skills and competencies and expect a miraculous re-invention of the company. Look around you. The average company is a 'me-too' company, with similar processes and systems and similar skills and competencies. In what should be your desperate quest to get out of the 'me-too' company, you need to switch to contrarian thinking and look at those 12 kinds of people. This is the company you want for your company!

Don't despair too soon if you have difficulty finding them. If you look at the business world, these twelve kinds of people at first seem like a big statistical anomaly, crossing the standard borders of the standard company. But these characters are also in search of a company. You just have to make sure that you are 'that company' where they can act. And this is bound to first challenge your own style of leadership: seducing, hiring and providing the space. Forget the famous 'war on talent'. This is war on elites, the often counterintuitive set of new skills that can save you from the 'me-too' company trap.

So what happens with 'the old skills'? Well, for starters, you already have loads of them and social cleansing is not a good idea. There are many traditional skills and competencies that history has shown bring good things to the life of the organization. This book doesn't address them. They have become baseline stuff, a pass, a necessity for the wellbeing of the machinery. These twelve new types, however, can come to the rescue to take you to a higher level of possibilities. If you believe that the journey to create wealth is a little bit more complex than a 'continuous increase in quarterly results', then you need to look hard for those different fellow travellers.

Build the briefing now

At the end of each chapter, I will offer you the gist of a recruitment briefing. It is written very informally by design! In the same spirit and style, I then offer you a 'profile', followed by suggestions of what to do 'in the office' in the meantime, until these people appear one way or another.

Which brings me to the inevitable question of whether these 'kinds of people' or new skills can be home-grown or developed. I have good news and bad news. The good news is that there is no reason why the organization could not practice those skills and learn to act as if there were more of those twelve kinds of people around. The bad news is that a great deal of the skills we all have, started to be developed in kindergarten. Kindergartens, primary

schools, secondary schools and even business schools also follow the rule of periodically changing their own oil and benchmarking themselves against the average kindergarten, primary school, secondary school and business school. This means that we are running a self-perpetuating 'me-too' world. Yes, I hope that education will re-shape itself at some point. But it may be a long shot to do your corporate road shows in kindergartens, as it will be a long wait for you to hire that toddler when he becomes available. So, in the meantime, I guess it's down to pure hunting.

After that, you need to host them, nurture them and re-create a new skill-base that can deal more effectively with the new challenges. The hope is that, by infecting your organization with truly different ways of thinking and doing, the whole company will gain. In the business organization there is room for a broad spectrum of skills. I am dealing here with the minority: the unconventional and perhaps the life-saving. Twelve kinds of people you can't afford not to have around. They won't solve all the problems by themselves, but without them, you are in a more-of-the-same space. The choice is yours.