

# HELLO I'M A GAME CHANGER

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THE DNA OF A GAME CHANGER **REPORT 2015**

**EG·1**

elevating  
organisations  
through data  
and people

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# WELCOME



## Foreword

I see eg.1's 'THE DNA OF A GAME CHANGER' as an extremely welcomed and pioneering addition to our understanding of leadership and of corporate leadership in particular.

This study plugs a gap in the research on leadership by giving us a detailed insight and practical understanding of those special people who rarely surface in the corporate world but, when they do, leave a lasting impression on us: **'The Game Changers'**.

'Game Changers', as defined by this research are a counter-balance to leadership that is often based upon safe, continuous improvement at best and 'if it ain't broke don't fix it' at worst. They embody the Darwinian drive to both survive and thrive by not only adapting positively to their environment but by shaping it with anticipation and vision. They are certainly not 'creatures of habit', they are individuals obsessively driven to convert ideas into reality and will take risks to make this happen.

Using a methodical approach, eg.1 has managed to define and understand the characteristics of the 'Game Changer'. The data draws upon the direct experience of a number of senior executives. At its core, the research presents a profile of those individuals who have the capability to drive and lead paradigm-changing initiatives in organisations. The conclusions are underpinned by sound statistical analyses and the insights will resonate for many of us fortunate enough to have worked alongside game changing individuals.

This report will benefit those responsible for making the difficult talent decisions when tasked to do 'something different'. It will help mitigate those inherent unconscious biases which are our safety nets at times of uncertainty and perceived risk. It provides a framework to explain those bold talent decisions we may not ordinarily make.

As the digital revolution and the global economy continue to change the workplace as we know it, the old adage of **'Innovate or Die'** has never been so prominent." CEOs will read this work and ask the question: "Who are my Game Changers?", "What are we doing to select and nurture them?" HRDs will read this research and have a broader, more in-depth understanding of talent and how 'Game Changers' can be at the heart of new approaches and initiatives, to add value to corporate endeavour.

**DR JOHN MERVYN-SMITH**  
Chartered Psychologist and Lecturer BSc,  
PhD, DPsych, AFBPS



# WE HAVE IDENTIFIED THE DNA OF A GAME CHANGER. THIS DNA HAS THE POTENTIAL TO SHAKE UP THE TALENT INDUSTRY.



**NATHAN OTT**, CEO of eg.1  
Business Insight and  
Talent consultancy

**For over 15 years I have sat across the table from senior executives trying to help them describe the key talent they need to drive their businesses forward. Typically, after we have spent time analysing all of the desired experience and attributes required, the session will end with a phrase like “you know what I mean - they need that spark” or “I’ll know when I see them”.**

This has always played on my mind - what makes these individuals stand out? What is that star quality that everyone recognises but cannot articulate? Ultimately, I was given the final push to commission this research after watching Gina, a young aboriginal woman on a BBC documentary about the lesser known parts of Australia. >

## › cont'd

With her community at risk of forced displacement by the government and a global mining company, Gina decided enough was enough and came up with a way to change things. She set about providing for her community through building a haulage business and contracting services back to the mining company at a profit.

On the face of things everything was against Gina, there were no open doors, but she saw a better way and was going to see it through. A few years on and the community became more affluent, crime rates dropped, schooling and other basic services improved and all because this one woman had the drive, focus and determination to get there. Why did she do this? Why didn't anyone else? What qualities did Gina have over and above the leaders of the community? I wanted to find out...

There are other people like Gina, people who deliver disproportionate levels of value than their peers. Those that will drive a business forward over and above expectations or their respective pay grades. These are individuals with the X Factor, they have that "je ne sais quoi".

Every employer wants to recruit someone who has this 'special something' but the reality is very few can describe what 'it' looks like. As a result more often than not a tick-box assessment approach is taken and a hope that 'gut feel and instinct' will prevail to discover this incredible talent.

Unfortunately this approach to recruitment and assessment has inadvertently led to a number of forms of discrimination and many businesses are losing out.

The modern global economy demands instant results and equal opportunities for all. We need individuals with this 'special something' at every level of our organisations who make this happen and we need to enable them to excel. With this in mind, **we set about discovering what makes them tick.**

For years there has been the gravy train of business books written and consultant fees paid around the phenomenon of leadership consulting, high potentials and the development of top talent. The problem: there is too much focus on climbing the corporate ladder. The corporate world is changing and we are missing a trick by focusing on the "need to get to the top" as the main indicator of success. Is this really getting the best out of everyone and driving our businesses forward?

Our findings in this report have the potential to shake up the talent industry. We now have the code we need to identify the 'Game Changers' through the masses. It's now up to us, as business leaders, to use this as a platform to change the way we recruit and nurture those who drive such disproportionate value in our organisations.

**NATHAN OTT**, CEO of eg.1  
Business Insight and Talent consultancy



# GAME CHANGERS

Where are our Game Changers?



# DON'T FIT IN BOXES

We have NO box to put them in



## COMPETENCY FRAMEWORK

- EXPERIENCE
- QUALIFICATIONS
- COMPETENCIES

# DNA OF A GAME CHANGER

THE 'GENETIC CODE' THAT EVERY EMPLOYER WANTS

This research produced a 'genetic code' for a Game Changer that differentiates them from the traditional leader or impact player profile.

We identified this DNA through our qualitative research and using the 'Repertory Grid' interview technique (see methodology, on page 30, for more information).

The DNA of a Game Changer consists of the following qualities and capabilities. They are:

- Big picture thinkers
- Very strategic
- High on vigour
- Creative idea generators
- Passionate about the idea
- Ambitious, obsessive drive to succeed
- Risk takers
- Strong influencers of people (above and below)
- Great at articulating a vision
- Likeable



This qualitative research was complemented and reinforced by our quantitative research results, with respondents saying that they believed Game Changers provided most value to their businesses in terms of creativity and innovation (56%), instigating change (39%) and strategic thinking (36%).

Figure 3: Where do Game Changers add most value to your business? (Respondents were asked to select up to three from the list.)



# WHO ARE THE GAME CHANGERS?



**STEVE JOBS**  
Those that took part in the quantitative research put Jobs at the top of the list of modern day Game Changers.

**Every one of the many thousands of leaders we speak to understands that to achieve progress they need those game changing individuals who are willing to take risks, challenge tradition or change the status quo. But where, if at all, do they exist in our organisations?**

**Game Changers exist at every level**  
We believe Game Changers can be found at any level within an organisation. Our research supports this theory, with 84% of those interviewed in our study stating they do not believe a Game Changer has to hold a senior role in an organisation. Employers need to shift some of their attention away from focusing on high potentials and leadership capabilities. They need Game Changers in every part of the business.

**Real Game Changers are few and far between**  
The research suggests that they make up a very small percentage of a workforce. 21% of respondents said that Game Changers make up less than 11% of their workforce but a further 51% of organisations stated that less than 5% of their workforce are Game Changers.



**DICK FOSBURY**  
Why did Fosbury jump backwards before anyone else?

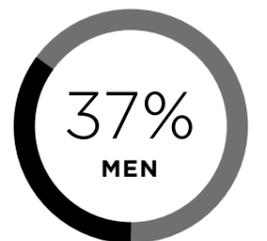


**OPRAH WINFREY**  
Millions of people come from impoverished backgrounds, what makes Oprah so special?

With a limited number of individuals being identified as Game Changers, does this mean they really are so few and far between? This is certainly a factor but equally we believe game changing individuals are being overlooked through standard assessment and development processes. Perhaps organisations need to work harder to identify them and create a culture in which they can thrive.

**Fewer female Game Changers**  
Over one-third of those interviewed believe the majority of Game Changers are, men, compared to just 7% who say women.

Whilst this isn't altogether clear, this data does present some traditional theories, such as male Game Changers being more 'visible' than female Game Changers and men being willing to push themselves forward more. We are planning to undertake additional research to explore this gender difference and 'obsession' as a core quality of a Game Changer. We believe the gender differences around 'obsession' may help explain why on the face of things, there appear to be fewer female Game Changers in the corporate world.



37% of those interviewed felt that most of our corporate Game Changers are men.



7% of those interviewed felt that most of our corporate Game Changers are women.

“THEY ARE MOTIVATED BY THEIR DESIRE TO BE WORLD-CLASS”

ASHOK VASWANI, CEO OF PERSONAL AND CORPORATE BANKING AT BARCLAYS

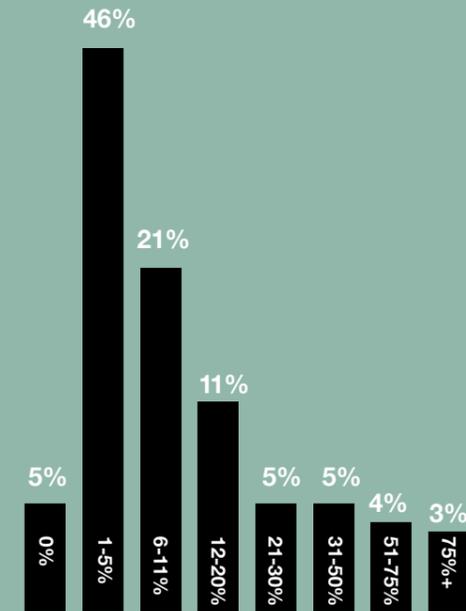


Figure 1: We asked everyone who took part in the research to indicate the percentage of people in their organisations who they believed to be Game Changers.

5%

Over half of respondents felt that less than 5% of their workforce are Game Changers.

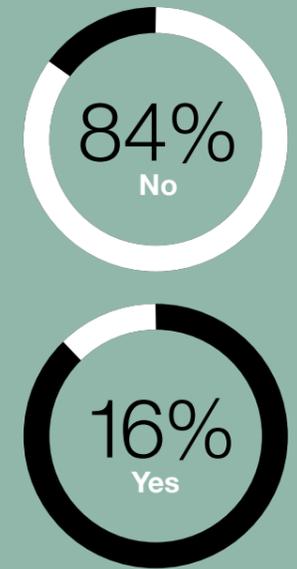


Figure 2: We asked if you need to be in a senior management/leadership role to be a Game Changer?

84%

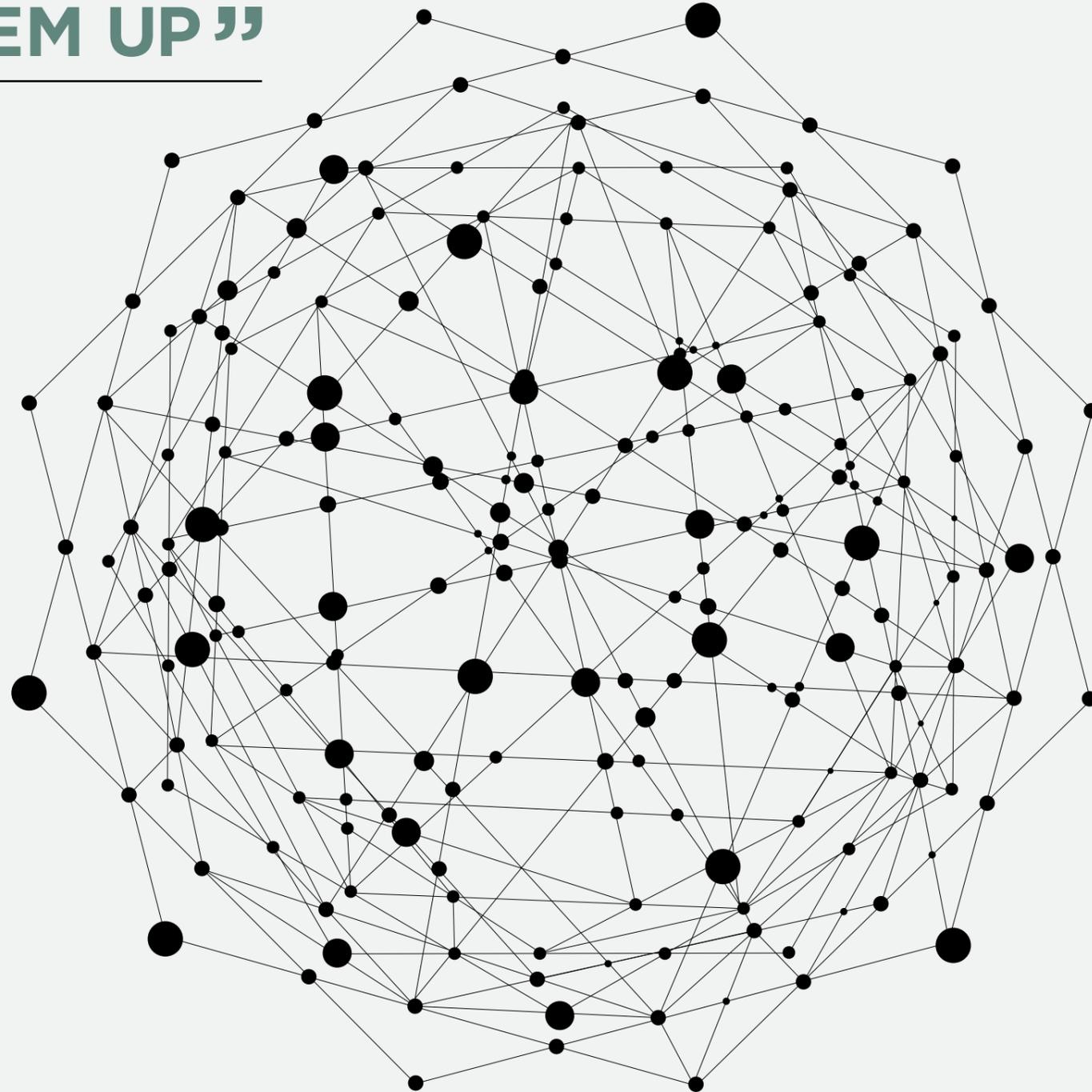
84% of those interviewed said they do not believe a Game Changer has to hold a senior role in an organisation.

“They light up the room when they arrive, grasping and maintaining the attention of the entire audience”

JONATHAN KEANE, PARTNER AT OLIVER WYMAN

**“GAME CHANGERS HAVE  
A BROAD PERSPECTIVE -  
THEY ARE AWARE OF  
ALL THE DOTS AND THEY  
CAN JOIN THEM UP”**

**PENNY HEMBROW**, HEAD OF BANKING AT CGI



ABSTRACT DNA MOLECULE

# WHAT DOES THIS DNA MEAN?

Like all genetic codes it is the level and combination of these elements that come together to make the 'special something'.

The research shows that Game Changers are not only 'ideas people' but they are willing to take a risk, will stop at nothing to get people on board and will drive an idea through to completion. Their genetic make up means they are not hindered by criticism, instead they see it as a chance to improve what they are doing and they view failure as a stepping-stone not a terminal event.

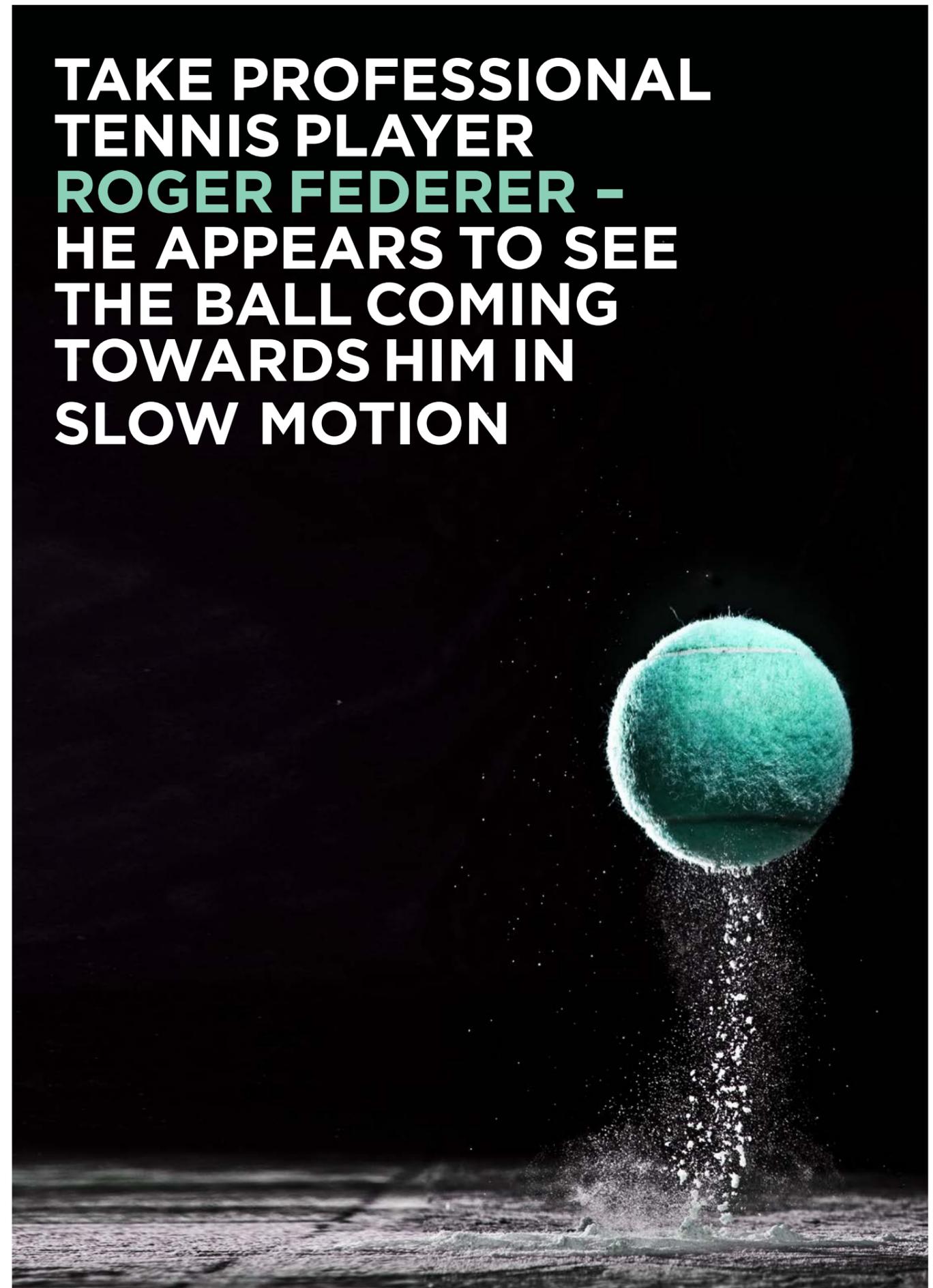
This is why they are so essential to businesses, particularly those that are seeking to transform themselves through the adoption of new products, services or operating models.

The Game Changer also has the skills to see new opportunities before others – they tend to see the world around them from 30,000ft and remain one step ahead of the crowd.

Take professional tennis player, Roger Federer – he appears to see the ball coming towards him in slow motion. At his best he was always thinking a number of shots ahead of his opponent, developing a special awareness of where things will be and when they will happen. The same is true for a Game Changer in the corporate world, they predict situations before others and make decisions accordingly. They can view business situations from high up in the stands whilst simultaneously being in the thick of the game.

In addition to this, the combination of extreme focus and high vigour fuels the obsession associated with game changing individuals. It is this obsession about the idea or their belief that will see them through. They will not stop until they succeed, they have an excessive thirst that will only be quenched once they see an idea or their own belief become reality.

# TAKE PROFESSIONAL TENNIS PLAYER ROGER FEDERER - HE APPEARS TO SEE THE BALL COMING TOWARDS HIM IN SLOW MOTION



ARE GAME CHANGERS

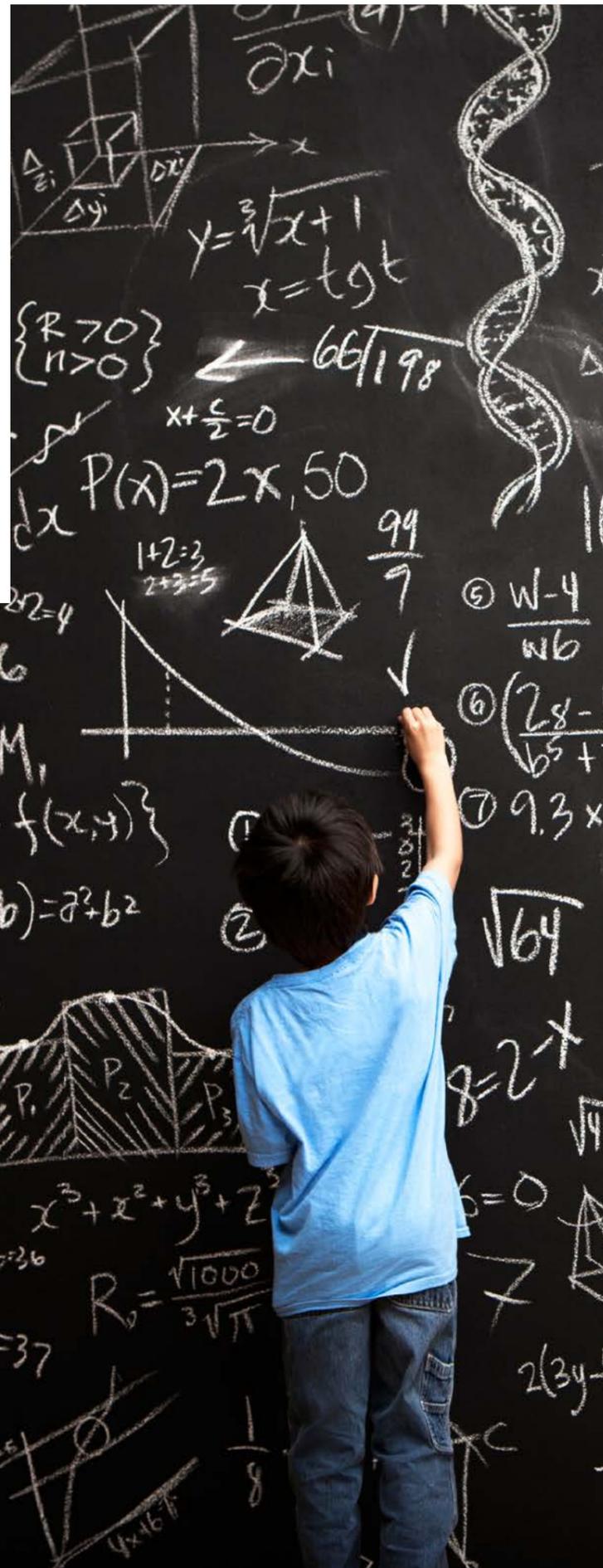
**BORN OR MADE?**

# BORN OR MADE?

An intriguing question is whether someone is 'born' a Game Changer or whether they can be developed to become a Game Changer? A debate that has important implications for recruitment as well as organisational development planning.

The qualitative research shows Game Changers have a specific DNA, as identified on page 10 (DNA of a Game Changer).

Almost two-thirds of respondents say they believe these natural qualities can be further nurtured in individuals, to aid the fulfilment of their Game Changer potential.



# CAN A MEMBER OF STAFF BE DEVELOPED TO THINK LIKE A GAME CHANGER?



## WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

Here we have to consider other research around the difference between inherent behaviours and those that can be learned, which enters us into the whole nurture vs. nature debate. It is widely accepted that leaders can be developed, however based on our research we question whether certain game changing behaviours can be learned. Can you really teach someone to inherently take risks, be creative or be a visionary?

What the research does suggest however, is that some Game Changers have the potential within them but just need a little support to release this. For example, you can't teach someone to be obsessive but you can help someone find their obsession and therefore unlock their game changing qualities.

# TRADITIONAL LEADER VS. GAME CHANGER

A Game Changer will supersede vision and passion with obsession.

**A Game Changer can be a leader, but not all leaders are Game Changers**

Our research identifies the key behaviours that Game Changers possess which traditional leaders are more likely to lack.

**These are:**

- Risk taking
- Creative idea generation
- Ambition with an obsessive drive to succeed
- High on vigour

**Game Changers are not afraid to challenge the status quo**

Whilst they are likeable in their nature Game Changers do not strive to be liked, their priority is seeing the idea come to fruition not personal achievement. Unlike the traditional leader profile, they are more willing to have the difficult conversations and challenge the status quo.

Many traditional leaders can't or in many cases won't, challenge the corporate comfort zones in quite the same way because of their need to be liked and respected. You could argue, breaking it down to a more basic level, that traditional leaders are paid to be liked and to make their company be liked and rely on the Game Changers to drive things forwards.

**Game Changers are less averse to risk**

By their nature traditional leaders are often more risk averse and have a greater need for personal security on their route up the corporate ladder. They can't afford to take a gamble so instead focus more on ensuring that tried and tested processes are followed by the business. By contrast, a Game Changer is not scared of failure because they know they will be successful in the end.

**Leaders are more concerned with status**

The research suggests that unlike many traditional leaders, Game Changers are not driven by personal ambition to maintain their power within their own organisation. Instead they are driven by their ambition for the idea. The Game Changer's unique combination of high self-confidence coupled with a low ego sets them apart from the traditional leader profile.

**Game Changers drive ideas through obsession**

Leaders are traditionally taught to sell a vision for people to follow and if they can do that with passion and enthusiasm it is all the more powerful. However, as previously mentioned our research suggests that a Game Changer will supersede vision and passion with obsession. A Game Changer will instil this in others to ensure the idea becomes a reality.

Whilst every organisation needs a strong leader, the modern global economy demands instant results and continuous innovation. For this reason Game Changers are one of the most valuable assets to organisations in terms of their growth and future stability.

“ THE GAME CHANGER IS ABOUT THE POWER OF THE IDEA; THE LEADER IS ABOUT THE POWER OF THE INDIVIDUAL ”

PAUL THOMPSON, PARTNER AT DELOITTE



“ GAME CHANGERS WOULD DO THE JOB EVEN IF THEY DID NOT GET PAID FOR IT ”

PATRICK BUTCHER, GROUP FINANCE DIRECTOR AT NETWORK RAIL



# ARE GAME CHANGERS RECRUITMENT GOLD OR FOOL'S GOLD?

More than 60% of organisations said that they are recruiting for high potential individuals.

Three-fifths of organisations that took part in the study said that they would look to recruit those individuals who are not necessarily the finished product, but whom they believe they can develop, to acquire those necessary skills and experience to become a Game Changer. Only 18% of organisations said that they would look to recruit Game Changers.

This raises some interesting questions:

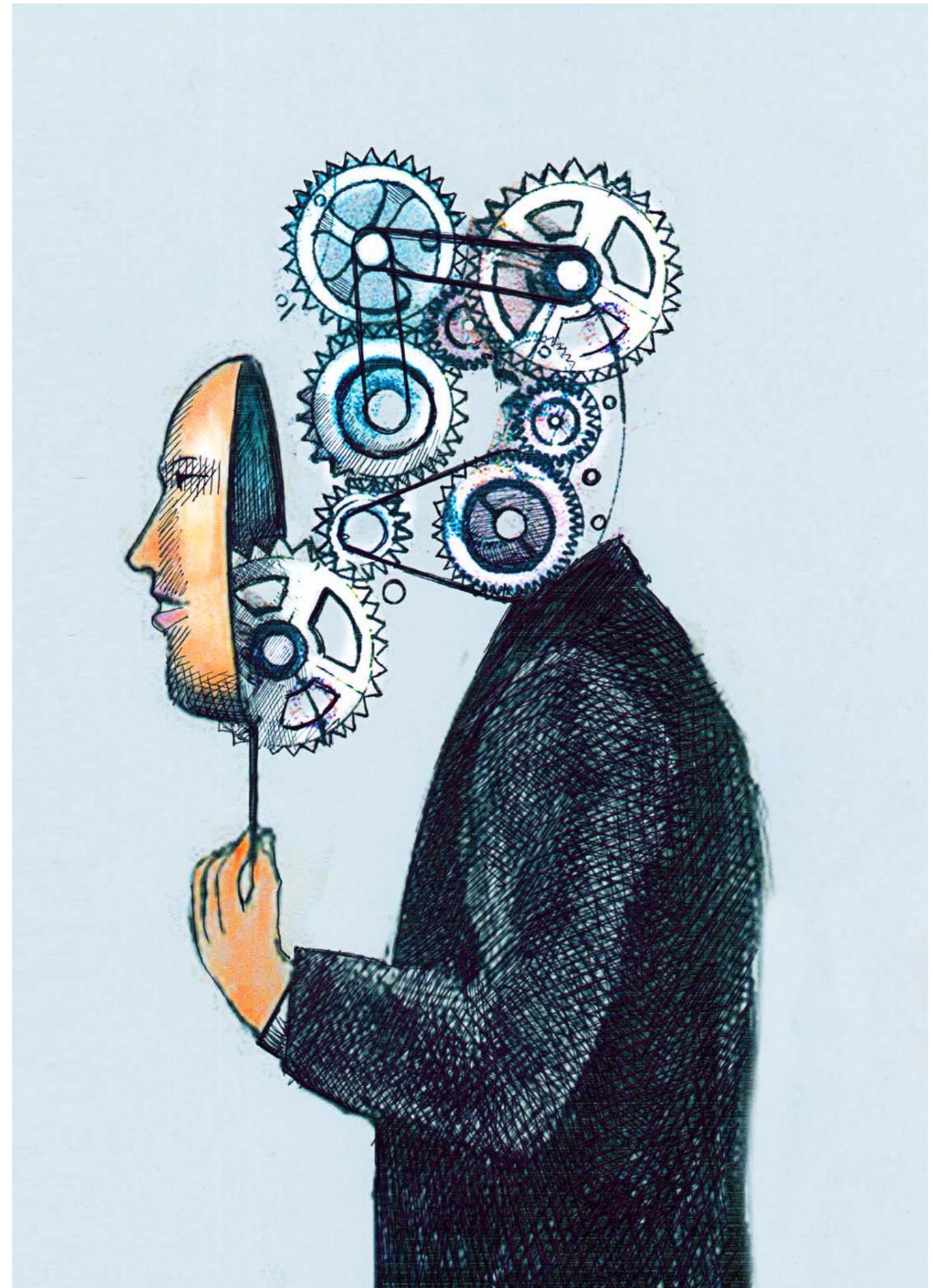
- A Do organisations realise that they should be recruiting Game Changers as the catalysts for their business transformation?**
- B Do organisations perceive that they can grow their own Game Changers, and include them within their high potentials?**
- C Can traditional methods identify the Game Changers?**

The most common mistake we have seen organisations face is when they have recruited individuals who they perceive to be Game Changers. There are always high hopes and based on initial assessments these individuals seem to have the game changing qualities required to transform the business.

However, it is often after a few months that the organisation realises those special people it thinks it has hired do not have the specific DNA. As a result they either leave when the going gets too tough, are exited from the organisation or get lost in the masses.

Unless current recruitment and talent development processes undergo change, there is a chance that the future high potentials will be clones of what has gone before, thereby continuing a risk averse and non-innovative culture.

**The strongest organisation is one that employs a myriad of complementary individuals. Depending on what you need, a Game Changer can either be real gold or fool's gold.**



# CONCLUSION: WHAT THIS MEANS FOR BUSINESS

The main concept of business management and leadership is being challenged by the change in technology, global economy and increasing demand for a more diverse workforce. As business strategies are being overhauled daily, leading organisations are now recognising the importance of Game Changers to the future of their business.

Organisations know they cannot afford to carry on as 'normal'. The world of work is relentless in its pace; every day there are new entrants coming into the market that are responsive, willing to take risks and change direction quickly.

Game Changers are motivated by different factors to leaders; they are wired differently. The research shows that they have a specific 'DNA' and this creates a platform for us to change the face of recruitment, talent development and organisational design as we know it.

Organisations need to think more about how they will differentiate themselves through the talent they employ. We can no longer afford to discriminate and recruit on the basis of previous experience or someone's current position on the corporate ladder.

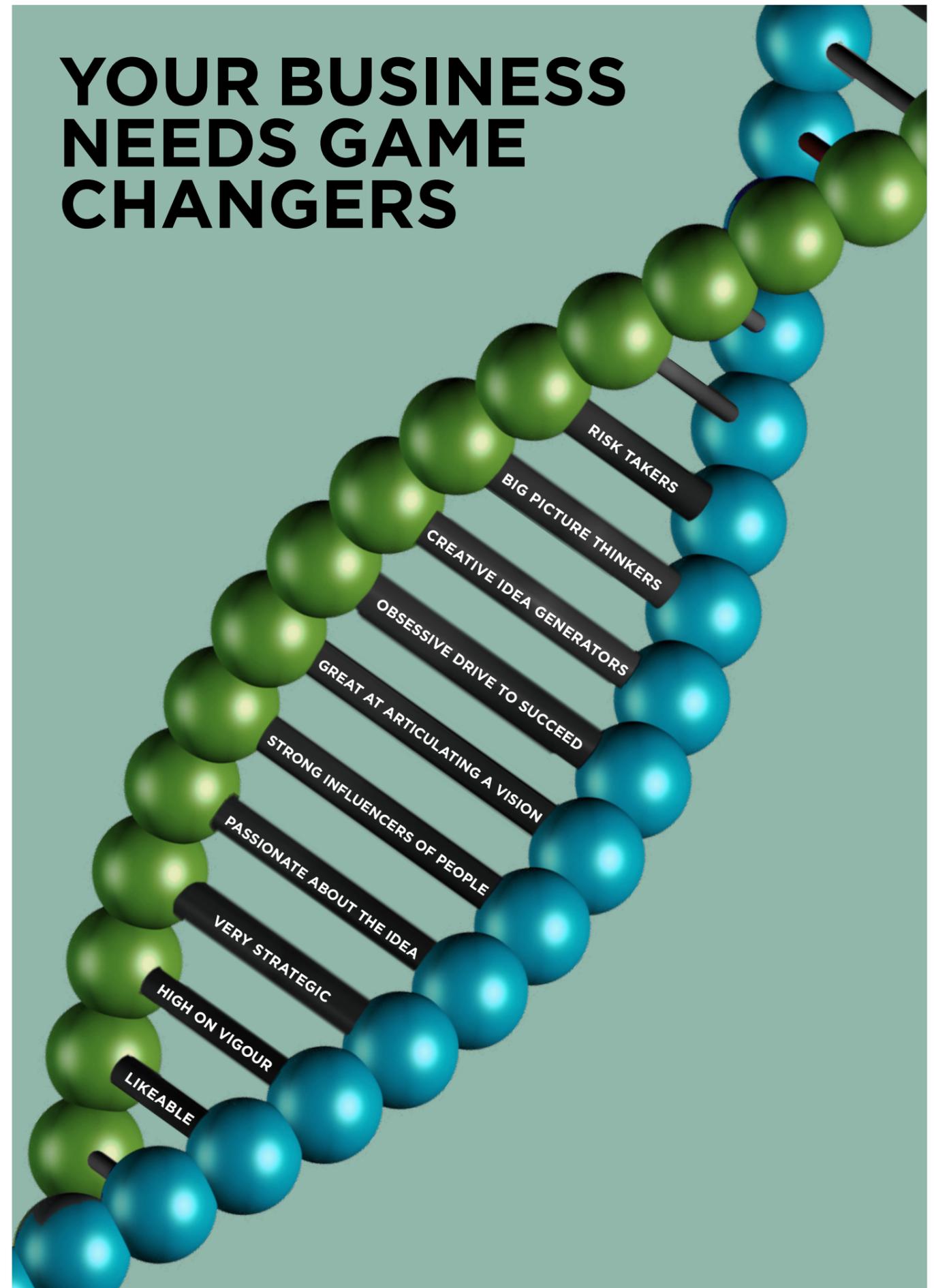
Leaders need to create a culture that empowers managers to look for these game changing individuals and allow them to take risks.

We see organisations instructing their managers to hire people who will make a difference but then confine them to a process with the same old corporate wide metrics and assessment frameworks. Follow the same old process and the needle will never shift.

**Just because someone doesn't fit into the current model doesn't mean they won't achieve. It's time to change the operating model. There are Game Changers at every level of our organisations - the 20% who drive 80% of the value - the ones that make good companies great.**

This research has helped us establish the DNA of a Game Changer. We now know what sets them apart and what makes them tick. It will be the organisations that are successful in identifying people with this DNA and creating the right environment for them to thrive that will be the winners in the decade to come.

# YOUR BUSINESS NEEDS GAME CHANGERS



# METHODOLOGY

This report was commissioned by eg.1 (www.eg.1.co.uk) the business insight and talent consultancy dedicated to elevating organisations through data and people.

Detailed insights were obtained through qualitative interviews with senior business executives from a variety of large organisations around the world. The assessment technique 'Repertory Grid' was employed to identify and qualify the personal attributes and behaviours of Game Changers. The Repertory Grid technique is based on the Personal Construct Theory devised by George Kelly in 1955.

During interviews, business executives were asked to define the characteristics of Game Changers they had worked with, and how these might differ to other types of people within organisations (i.e. non-Game Changers). Statistical analysis determined which of those characteristics were statistically significant in differentiation of the Game Changers from non-Game Changers.

Additional insight was gathered via a quantitative survey of 242 business executives carried out, by Dialogue (www.dialoguereview.com), in September 2014. For more information please email [emma@beheardmedia.co.uk](mailto:emma@beheardmedia.co.uk)

**For more information about eg.1's Game Changer Profiling and Performance Programme and how it can help you identify, assess and integrate, Game Changers in your organisation, please email [gamechangers@eg1.co.uk](mailto:gamechangers@eg1.co.uk)**

**You can also follow us on Twitter:  
[@gamechangerhub](https://twitter.com/gamechangerhub)**

# THANKS

**We would like to thank all the companies who contributed to this research. These include:**

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- **EC Harris**
- **Grant Thornton**
- **HCL**
- **Mercer**
- **MunichRe**
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### **About eg.1**

**eg.1 is a business insight and talent consultancy.**

**We work globally with organisations when they want to scale, make a strategic step change or simply disrupt the status quo.**

**Our methodology encompasses the acquisition of game changing people, teams and companies underpinned by bespoke market intelligence and talent frameworks.**

#### **What we believe:**

**We believe that game changing organisations are not driven by mediocre individuals.**

#### **What we propose:**

**We propose to elevate organisations through the provision of game changing data and people.**

**For more information please visit:**

**[www.eg1.co.uk](http://www.eg1.co.uk)**

**Thank you.**