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**EXPLORING**

**THE TEAM** +

**DYNAMICS**

**of MBA students**

**and graduates**

In 2017 and 2018 AMBA joined forces with The GC Index to conduct groundbreaking research into how MBAs are impacting game-changing teams. **David Woods-Hale** and **Dr John Mervyn-Smith** take a look at the results

In a volatile, uncertain world, reacting to constant disruption, it is vitally important that organisations have a methodology for creating 'game-changing' teams, which can launch innovative projects from scratch and see them through to successful conclusion.

In practice, a definition of 'the perfect team' is too simplistic for the complexity of business that we face and creating a game-changing business future is a team effort.

It follows that if business leaders want to change the game, they must recognise and recruit collaborators who might not fit the moulds that have traditionally been cast over the years.

Putting this into the context of the MBA, AMBA joined forces with The GC Index to explore the team dynamics of MBA students and graduates, to ascertain the game-changing contributions they're currently making and the challenges they're facing in terms of collaboration on business ideas. AMBA's exclusive study looked at influence within collaborative teams as well as leadership, conflict and defining the individual strengths that lead to shared success.

#### METHODOLOGY

The GC Index® is a scientific framework that enables individuals, teams and organisations to identify how they make their impact and how they can change the game. It doesn't measure personality type, skills or leadership qualities, instead focusing on how individuals prefer to contribute to a project, role or organisation – their natural inclination. It is revolutionising the way that individuals, teams and organisations operate, shifting mindsets to focus on impact.

Based on detailed analyses of businesses and their leaders, the GC Index® has ascertained five clearly identifiable roles that are needed for a team that delivers:

**The Game Changer** – transforms the future by bringing original ideas

**The Strategist** – maps the future by making sense of great ideas and setting a direction for others to follow

**The Implementer** – Builds the future by making great ideas happen, moving into action and getting things done

**The Polisher** – creates a future to be proud of by making great ideas brilliant, improving other people's ideas and raising quality standards

**The Play Maker** – orchestrates the future by bringing great ideas together and getting everyone to work better

From this fresh thinking emerges a framework for leadership and team building. This is multidimensional, strengths-based, and works with an individual's preferred contribution in role, or proclivity. AMBA and The GC Index® used an online questionnaire to survey 865 MBAs between September 2017 and January 2018. Just under one third of these (31%) were MBA students at AMBA-accredited Business Schools at the time of filling in the survey, while the remaining 69% had graduated from AMBA-accredited programmes.

Of the respondents, 44% were CEOs, managing directors, board members or senior managers; 64% had budgetary responsibility within their organisation; 50% worked in organisations with an annual turnover in excess of £10m; 6% were self-employed. Respondents represented all industries.

In terms of company size, 5% were sole traders; 54% worked in organisations with less than 1,000 members of staff; and 41% worked in organisations with more than 1,000 people. Just over two-thirds of respondents were male (68%), 31% were female and 1% preferred not to say.

Data from the GC Index® shows that for the most part people settle in their roles typically have two dominant proclivities. So, for example, a common GC Index® profile among engineers is Game Changer - Implementer. These individuals are creative (Game Changer) practical problem solvers (Implementer).

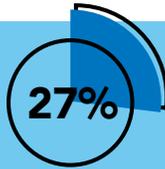
Accompanying the quantitative survey, 25 respondents took part in in-depth interviews with psychologists at The GC Index and the qualitative results will be published in a future edition of AMBITION.

### CONTRIBUTING TO A TEAM

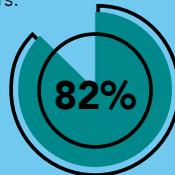
MBA respondents were divided according to how they best contribute to teams.

In terms of self-identification, 27% believed themselves to be Implementers (moving

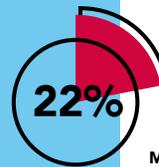
### Key findings



More than a quarter of MBAs (27%) believed themselves to be Implementers; just over a fifth (22%) perceived themselves to be Game Changers; 21% said they were Strategists; 18% identified as Polishers; and 12% said they were Playmakers.



More than eight out of 10 (82%) felt that their role in a team is always or often understood by others.



Just over one in five respondents (22%) said that less than half of the teams in which they had worked had had the right dynamics of skills and personalities to succeed.



Only 20% of respondents said it has 'always' been made clear to them how team members' contributions complement one another. 'Poor leadership' and 'communication issues between team members' were seen as the most damaging issues to the success of teams.

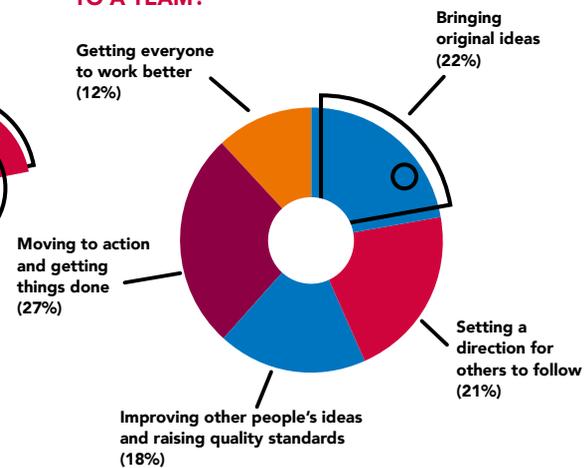


Two thirds of respondents (66%) said that poor leadership had been a factor of breakdown in collaboration in the past year. Of these, 26% said this manifested itself in the form of micro-management; 25% said the leader was disengaged; 14% believed the leader was actively obstructive; and 10% said that the leader had prevented autonomy.

into action to get things done); 22% perceived themselves to be Game Changers (bringing original ideas); 21% said they were Strategists (setting a direction for others to follow); 18% identified as Polishers (improving other people's ideas and raising quality standards); and 12% said they were Playmakers (getting everyone to work together).

The results were virtually the same among students and graduates and across management levels, although almost one in five (18%) of CEOs and managing directors believed themselves to be Playmakers, compared to 12% overall.

### HOW DO YOU BEST CONTRIBUTE TO A TEAM?



Dr John Mervyn-Smith, Chief Psychologist at The GC Index, explains: 'The data suggests that, in terms of GC Index® proclivities, the MBA population, comprising both students and graduates, is a diverse group. It varies very little from what would be expected in a large random population; in other words, 20% for each proclivity.

'Given this, the findings also suggest that individuals with an MBA can be successful in different ways, reinforcing the view that people should play to their GC Index® strengths.

'There is a suggestion that the Playmaker role is more evident in CEOs. Therefore ambitious MBA students, depending upon their aspirations, may see the benefits of developing their Playmaker skills.'

### Influence and the contribution of others

Although MBAs were clear about their contributions to team dynamics, only 20% of respondents in total (and 21% of graduates) said it has 'always' been made clear to them

**'Ego-driven, 'tough' negotiators usually come across as bullying or inflexible'**

how members' contributions complemented one another within a team.

Survey participants were asked to rank how influential they felt they were as part of a team on a scale of one to 10, in which 10 was most influential and the average score was 8 among respondents.

More than eight out of 10 respondents (82%) felt that their role in a team was always or often understood by others. However, the survey showed that 6% of MBAs rarely feel that their contribution and role has been understood by other colleagues on a team.

Mervyn-Smith explains: 'The key to achieving long-term success is to transform individual action into collective power. To do this effectively, you need not only to understand how you can best contribute and make an impact but also how other team members make their impact. Only then will you be able to place them in the right roles and environments.'

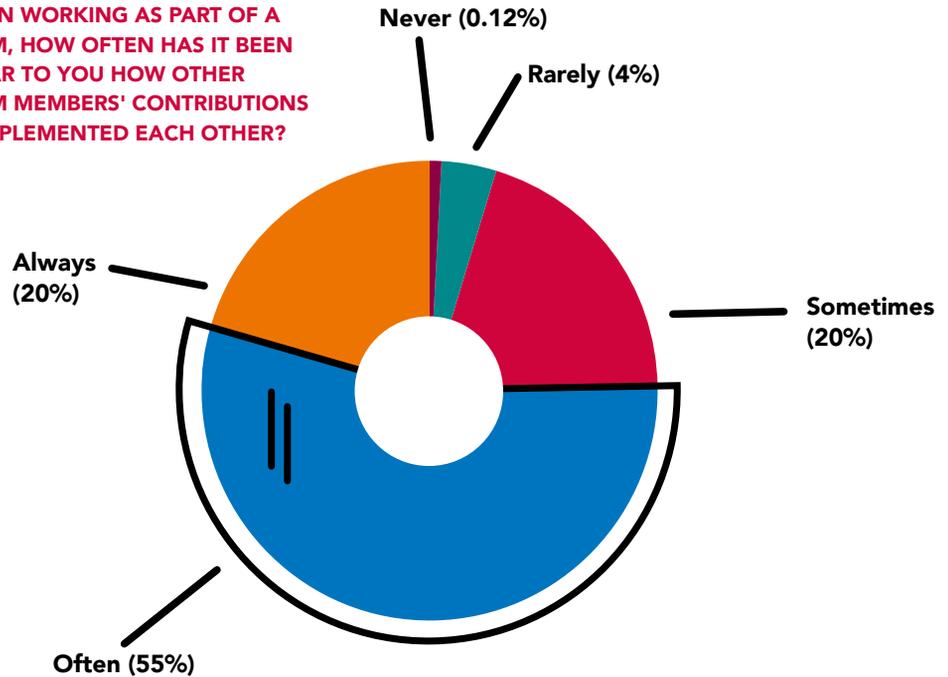
'The teams and organisations that get this right and communicate openly about how everyone in the team makes an impact are the ones that are winning when it comes to transformation.'

**Measuring the success of teamwork**

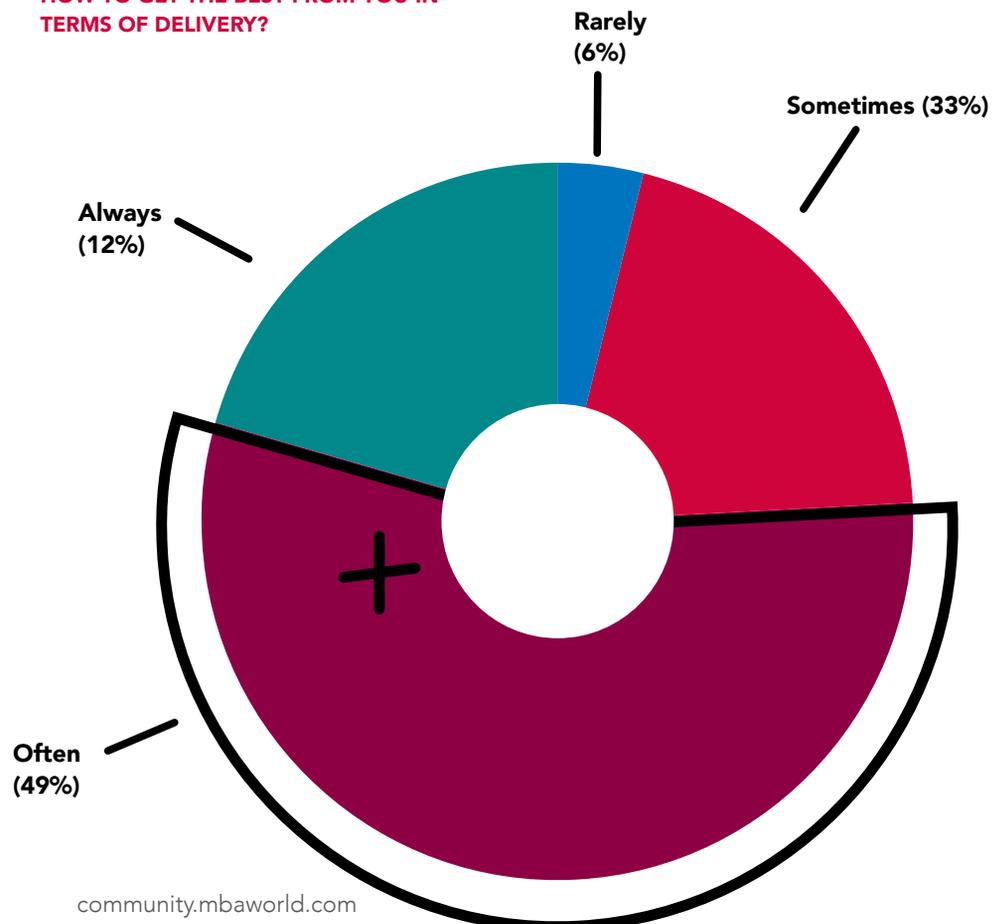
Respondents to the online survey were asked to consider how well the teams they've been part of over the past year have performed. Just under eight in 10 MBAs (79%) agreed or strongly agreed that the teams in which they have worked have collaborated well to complete tasks. Just under three quarters (74%) were of the opinion that there was a spirit of team work in their teams; and just 12% agreed or strongly agreed that the teams they have been part of during the past year have not worked well together.

In saying that, more than one in five (21%) agreed or strongly agreed that the teams in which they have worked have lacked the necessary skills to complete tasks effectively and a similar proportion (22%) said their

**WHEN WORKING AS PART OF A TEAM, HOW OFTEN HAS IT BEEN CLEAR TO YOU HOW OTHER TEAM MEMBERS' CONTRIBUTIONS COMPLEMENTED EACH OTHER?**



**WHEN WORKING AS PART OF A TEAM, HOW OFTEN HAVE YOU FELT OTHERS HAVE UNDERSTOOD YOUR ROLE AND HOW TO GET THE BEST FROM YOU IN TERMS OF DELIVERY?**



teams have lacked people with the right capabilities for the task, while less than two-thirds (55%) believed that their team colleagues all had the right capabilities to succeed at a task; 23% were not sure.

'The findings are encouraging, reinforcing the notion that collaboration is a key element to team success,' says Mervyn-Smith. 'Collaboration, in turn, is best achieved when team members are aligned to purpose and practice, they understand their role and know how to play it, and they understand how they complement their colleagues and their colleagues complement them.'

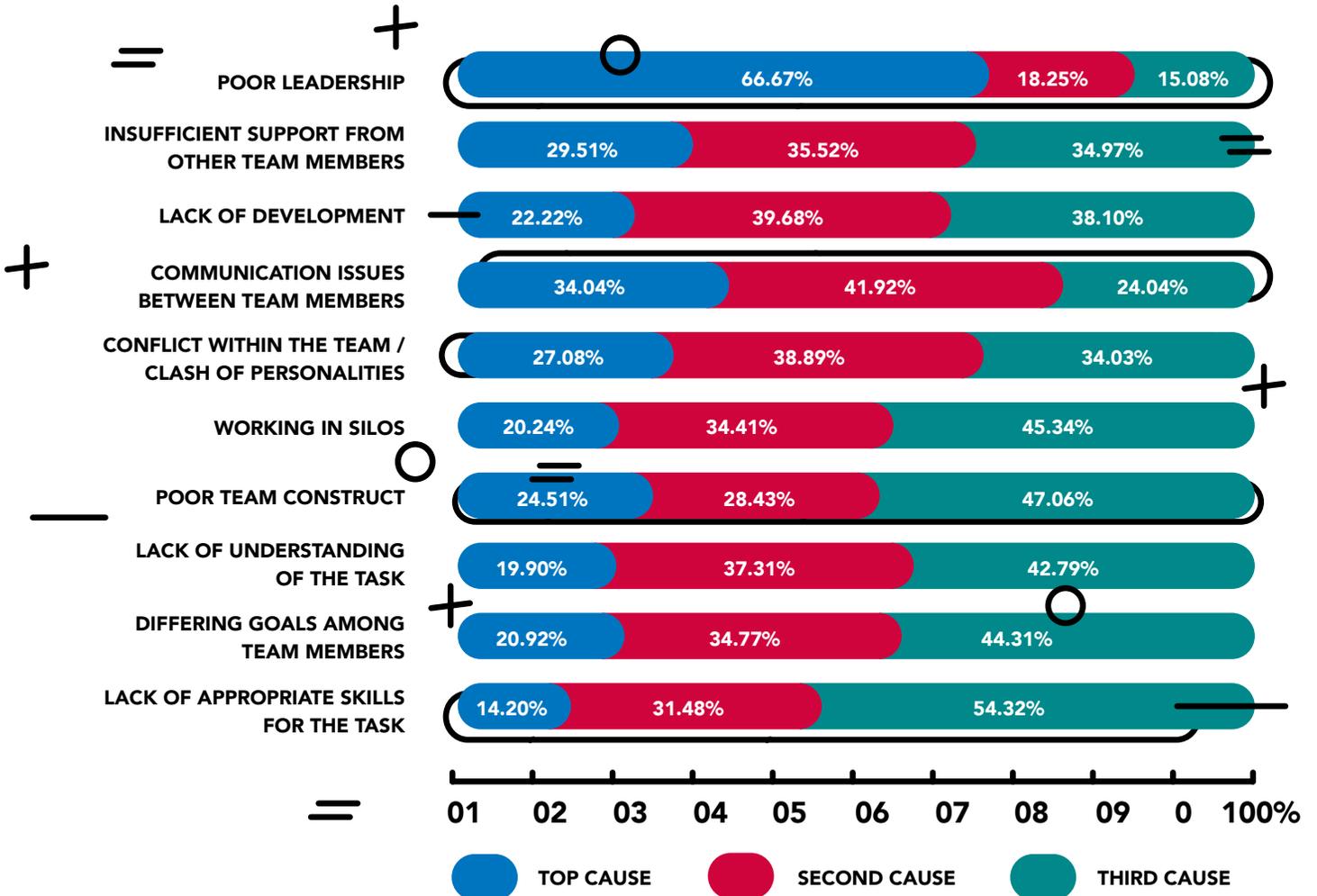
**'Collaboration is best achieved when team members are aligned to purpose and practice'**

**WHY DO TEAMS FAIL?**

Respondents were asked to outline the top three issues which they believe lead to breakdowns in team collaboration: 'poor leadership' and 'communication issues between team members' were seen as the most damaging.

Just over 58% of respondents cited poor leadership as a top-three issue, and of these, 66% said it was their top cause. Communication between team members was cited as a cause of team break down by 60% of respondents and more than a third of these participants (34%) said it was the top cause. Almost four in 10 respondents

**HOW WOULD YOU RANK THE TOP THREE ISSUES YOU BELIEVE CAUSE A BREAKDOWN IN TEAM COLLABORATION?**



ARE THERE OTHER ISSUES THAT YOU THINK CAUSE BREAKDOWNS IN TEAM PROJECTS?



(38%) said 'differing goals among team members' was a factor in team breakdown.

**We asked respondents to share their experiences of other reasons why teams had failed to work and suggestions included:**

- \_\_\_\_\_
- lack of clarity, purpose or goals
- \_\_\_\_\_
- cultural differences
- \_\_\_\_\_
- differences in skill levels
- \_\_\_\_\_
- promotion of personal interests over shared objectives
- \_\_\_\_\_
- lack of respect, emotional intelligence, - compromise or trust
- \_\_\_\_\_
- competition between team members or a blame culture
- \_\_\_\_\_
- egos and personality clashes
- \_\_\_\_\_
- disengagement; lack of interest or motivation from team members
- \_\_\_\_\_
- lack of accountability
- \_\_\_\_\_

- \_\_\_\_\_
- leader had failed to listen
- \_\_\_\_\_
- stress and pressure
- \_\_\_\_\_
- lethargy and lack of commitment
- \_\_\_\_\_
- short-termism
- \_\_\_\_\_
- groupthink
- \_\_\_\_\_
- conflict between 'innovation' and 'tried and tested'
- \_\_\_\_\_
- remote working and time zone differences
- \_\_\_\_\_
- budget and financial pressures.

According to Mervyn-Smith, the symptoms of dysfunction highlighted in the survey findings all reflect issues of alignment – or the lack of it. In *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*, business expert Patrick Lencioni outlines reasons why leaders fail in teamwork:

- absence of trust – this leads to vulnerability

- fear of conflict – resulting in artificial harmony
- lack of commitment – resulting in ambiguity
- avoidance of accountability – resulting in low standards
- inattention to results – resulting in status and ego

'These support our findings,' says Mervyn-Smith. 'Teams largely fail if individuals are not working to their strengths but also if they fail to come together as a team – there needs to be a common goal and understanding about how each person is going to help achieve this.'

'The GC Index® is a useful framework for helping teams to align themselves to purpose, vision, values, shared goals and practice.'

**The role of the leader**

A significant two thirds of respondents (68%) said that poor leadership had been a factor in the breakdown in collaboration. And, of those who regarded leadership as a negative impactor, 26% said this manifested itself in the form of micro-management, 25% said the leader was disengaged, 14% believed

the leader was actively obstructive, and 10% said the leader had prevented autonomy.

When asked to suggest other reasons why leaders had contributed to a breakdown of a team, respondents suggested that the leader:

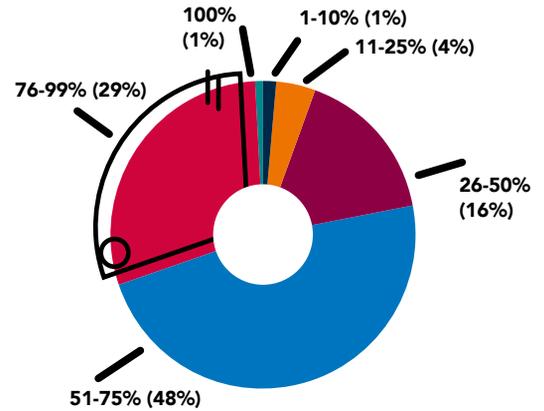
- failed to delegate
- lacked vision
- lacked direction
- lacked the skills for and/or knowledge about the project
- lacked commitment
- lacked empathy
- didn't respond well to alternative views
- Lacked leadership capabilities
- was too self-interested
- avoided taking decisions/ shirked responsibility
- was too detail-orientated.

## 'A defensive leader will undermine the team's capacity for quality debate'

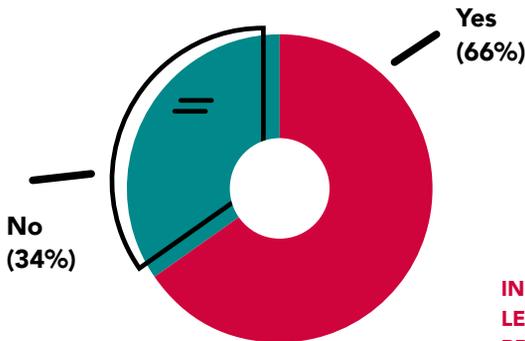
Mervyn-Smith says: 'One of the most reliable predictors of team dysfunction is the defensiveness, or otherwise, of the team's leader. A defensive leader will undermine the team's capacity for quality debate and decision making.'

'Helping a team leader to understand their role, in terms of their proclivities, and how to play it well, will help the leader to feel more confident and less defensive.'

## INDICATE THE PERCENTAGE OF TEAMS YOU HAVE WORKED IN THAT HAVE THE RIGHT COMBINATION OF INDIVIDUALS / SKILLS TO MEET OBJECTIVES



## HAS POOR LEADERSHIP BEEN THE CAUSE OF A BREAKDOWN IN COLLABORATION IN ANY TEAMS YOU HAVE WORKED IN OVER THE PAST YEAR?



### Perfecting team dynamics

AMBA and The GC Index were keen to find out how often the perfect team dynamic had been reached, so asked respondents what percentage of the teams they had been part of had comprised the perfect combination of individuals and skills to achieve goals and meet objectives.

Less than 1% of participants were confident that the teams in which they'd worked had the right combination of

individuals and skills to meet objectives 100% of the time. In fact, less than a third (29%) believed that their teams had had the right make up for success more than three-quarters of the time.

Almost half of the respondents (48%) said their teams had the skills and individuals to succeed 51%-75% of the time.

But more than one in five respondents (22%) said that less than half of the teams they'd been a part of had the right personality and skills dynamics to succeed.

Mervyn-Smith adds: 'We can learn from the world of sport when it comes to putting together effective leadership teams: in order to make an impact in a team, people need to understand the role that they can or need to play and they require the skills to play it well.'

'In GC Index® terms, Implementers, Strategists, Play Makers, Game Changers and Polishers all have a role to play at some point in successful teams. They just need to know when and how to make a contribution.'

New perspectives on, and approaches to teamwork, collaboration and leadership as we know it are needed.

Imagine an approach to teamwork that is not so much about the personality of the leader and a way of being in the world, as providing the freedom at work to explore your natural inclinations and leverage them for business benefits.

Just think how this could change the futures we create.

## INDICATE THE MAIN REASON FOR POOR LEADERSHIP BEING THE CAUSE OF A BREAKDOWN IN COLLABORATION

