

# KnowledgePills

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EXECUTIVE EDUCATION

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# How can leaders embrace change effectively?

## Change as a playable game to succeed in dynamic organizations

Today's disruptive changes are forcing companies and leaders to rethink their methods and adapt to a new reality:

The status quo is no longer an option.

Businesses need to embrace change as a dynamic, ongoing process to face the future. But how can leaders embrace strategic change effectively?



**Jaap Boonstra** MBA Professor

-  
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Jaap Boonstra is Professor at ESADE Business School and Professor at Vienna University for economy and business. His research focuses on transformational leadership, barriers to organizational change and innovation, power dynamics in organizational change, and sustainable development of organizations. Jaap has published more than two hundred articles on technological and organizational innovation, management of organizational change, organizational learning, politics in organizations, strategic decision-making and transformational change in the service sector and public administration.

ESADE Professor Jaap Boonstra has developed a metaphor for change as a game to embrace uncertainty. This perspective helps to deal with change as an ongoing process and is proven to be effective in adapting to rapidly changing environments.

His findings in *Deusto Harvard Business Review* show how applying change as a playable game can help leaders adopt proactive strategies and transform the fear of change into valuable opportunities. "Leaders shouldn't see change as a one-time planned effort, but as a dynamic and ongoing process," says Prof. Boonstra. "Approaching change as a playable game can help to tackle business challenges more effectively."



### key game strategies to embrace change

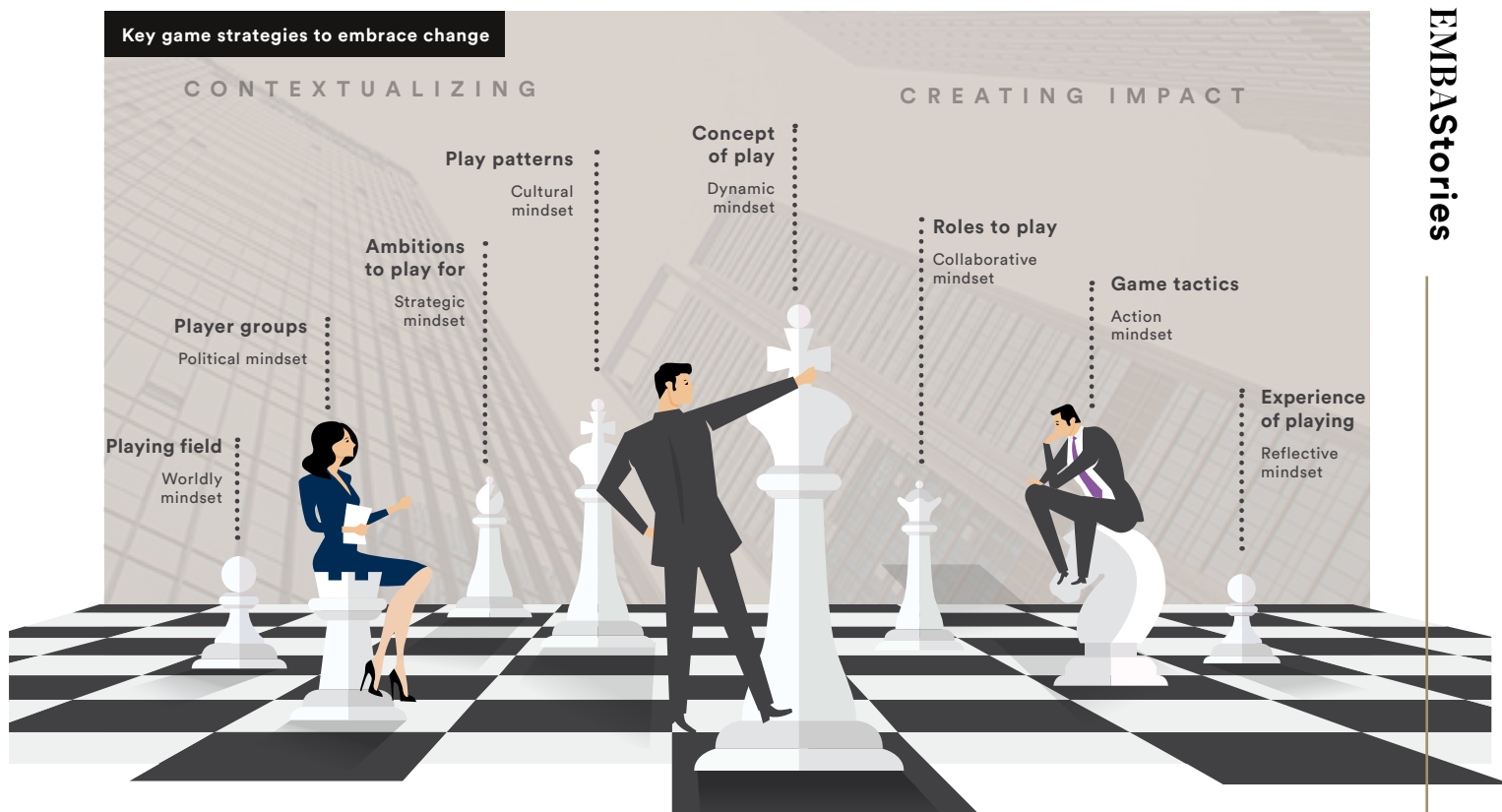
In order to embrace change effectively, Prof. Boonstra outlines 8 things leaders should follow if they are to succeed leading teams in changing environments.

#### 01. PLAYING FIELD: WORLDLY MINDSET

Like in a game, leaders need to explore the playing field, which includes understanding the dynamics of their company, their competitors, and the uncertain environment surrounding their business. The complex reality of businesses in today's changing world demands that leaders have a global vision that takes into account multiple perspectives and viewpoints. To lead change effectively, leaders also need to embrace a down-to-earth mentality, think beyond themselves and be sensitive to what is happening on the playing field to detect new opportunities.

#### 02. PLAYER GROUPS: POLITICAL MINDSET

The business world is also like a sports team, it has many players with different active roles in the playing field: competitors who can threaten the existing business models, politicians who can influence a company's decisions, government committees that can grant or



deny licenses, labor unions influencing a company's reputation, and so on. Leaders embracing change effectively have a global vision of the interests and positions of power of all the players on the playing field. With a political mindset they are capable of building coalitions with people who have initiative and are willing to take risks.

### 03. AMBITIONS TO PLAY FOR: STRATEGIC MINDSET

Strategic planning alone is no longer enough to prepare companies for the future. Businesses that have a clear vision are more likely to succeed when faced with strategic change. Leaders at the helm of change have a clear idea of what the company expects and needs. They are also transparent about what they value and what they reject at all costs. A strategic mindset helps one realize that the organization is a collective entity that achieves common purpose and builds a 'future-ready' enterprise.

### 04. PLAY PATTERNS: CULTURAL MINDSET

When companies face strategic and cultural changes, tension and potential conflicts become an obvious part of the game. The pioneers of change are sensitive to the values of the organization and people's social and emotional needs. Leaders with a cultural mentality know how to listen to others, they inspire, they are proactive in solving conflicts and are effective at making cultural change happen.

### 05. CONCEPT OF PLAY: DYNAMIC MINDSET

There is no 'one size fits all' way to change a company. Each challenge requires a combination of different game strategies. The first step is analyzing the dynamics of the playing field and defining the game goals. The second step is estimating the space and time required and the commitment of those who will be involved in the process of change. Leaders with a dynamic mindset know how to combine different strategies for change. For transformation to be successful, leaders have to deliberately pay attention to specific events to solve these challenges in a way that will ensure meeting the company's goals.

### 06. ROLES TO PLAY: COLLABORATIVE MINDSET

Business change cannot succeed without coalitions. Understanding the positions of power and interests of the players involved is crucial to lead change effectively. Embracing change requires all participants to have a clear vision of what is expected from them. A collaborative mindset helps realize change by bringing people together and fostering teamwork to make renewal possible. Choosing the right people at the right moment reduces uncertainty and creates supporters for change.

### 07. GAME TACTICS: ACTION MINDSET

Leaders who embrace change effectively take the initiative and invest their energy in things that need to be improved. How people work together and their interactions with customers are what drive change. People with an active attitude are sensitive to the playing field and are aware of the team's potential to embrace change. With an action mindset, change leaders maintain direction and guide people.

### 08. EXPERIENCE OF PLAYING: REFLECTIVE MINDSET

Seeing change as an ongoing game played out on an ever-shifting field is vital for meeting challenges. Leaders who excel at fostering change in companies know their strengths, their weaknesses and what moves them. They are accessible to others, accept honest comments, are not afraid of acknowledging emotions and take an active attitude towards learning. Change leaders are conscious players and have a reflective mindset which makes them aware of themselves and those around them.

Using the play-model in carrying out a process of ongoing changes helps to create meaning, make an impact on organizational change and add value to corporate purpose for customers, employees and society.