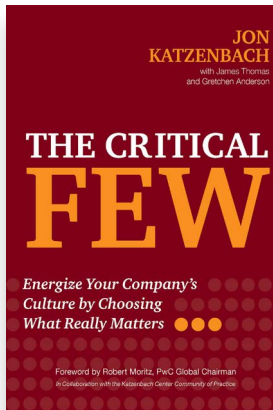


EXECUTIVE BOOK SUMMARIES

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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The Critical Few

THE NUTSHELL

Berrett-Koehler Publishers 2018

Prologue

This book is the product of five decades spent writing, talking, obsessing, and most of all doing *real work* with clients and colleagues related to the topic of organizational culture. If you are a leader at any level and you see an opportunity to move your business in a new direction, you will be far more successful if you engage your culture in your effort. Conversely, if you ignore your culture you will be far less likely to achieve your goals.

1. Why Aligning Culture Matters

Cultures are important and powerful because they determine what your company is capable of doing. An organizational culture is a collection of deeply held attitudes, entrenched habits, repeated behaviors, latent emotions, and collective perceptions of the world.

If you work in any large or well-established organization, you already know how seemingly impassable an entrenched, repeating set of behaviors can become. It takes persistence and attention to shift those habits, just as it does for personal habits like smoking and overeating. People don't change their habits quickly or easily, even when they have excellent reasons to do so. But habits can be changed, and cultures do evolve and this can be guided by you.

The Critical Few

2. A Critical Few Traits

Traits are at the heart of any organization. They are the essential characteristics that form the scaffolding for how any group of people thinks, feels, and behaves. They are stable, prominent qualities that are shared across a company. For any leader who seeks to understand a business's cultural challenges and how it operates, it's important to start by surfacing and articulating these critical few traits. The process of doing the diagnosis, the self-reflection, and the narrowing down is a crucial first step to both evolving and aligning an organization's cultural influence on how people behave to get things done emotionally as well as rationally in any organization.

3. A Critical Few Behaviors

It is important to note that successful, long-term organizational change efforts include simple, clear changes in specific behaviors. The more these changes become habitual with respect to *keystone habits*, the better. A new practice, day by day, can become habitual, rewarding, and socially encouraged instead of labored, sporadic, and discouraging. The idea that changing behaviors, rather than mindsets, is the most practical way to intervene in an organization's culture is at the heart of the critical few approach. A keystone habit is "a pattern that has the power to start a chain reaction." In other words, if you want to change the way people think, you don't start with or rely primarily on rational argument. You change what they do, even if it doesn't come naturally to them at first.

4. A Few Authentic Informal Leaders (AIL's)

Every organization has individuals within it whose social capital and emotional intuition set them apart from their peers. Furthermore, these special individuals can play a powerful role in driving positive change. When organizations are undergoing major challenges, such as strategic or operational transformation, engaging authentic informal leaders can help the greater organization accomplish what would otherwise be considered impossible.

Work with AIL's should be ongoing throughout your culture evolution process, taking the form of a series of discussions. You will ask for AILs' feedback on leaders' ideas. You will also ask them how they achieve their goals. Working with the energy of AILs is the best place to dig into cultural obstacles and to determine how you can align strategy, operating model, and culture. AILs are also the very best source of ideas for how to attach the high-minded aspirations of any culture program to real, tangible business results.

5. Measuring Cultural Action

One of the central messages of this book is that cultural situations evolve slowly over time. You can't point your finger and mandate behavior change. You can intervene to create the conditions that make the right behaviors emerge. We use the word *intervention* as a broad term for any deliberate act that an organization undertakes to explain, encourage, reinforce, or reward critical behaviors.

The Critical Few

You're looking to surround your people with a coherent system of "enablers," some formal and some informal, that all, taken together, suggest a new path. We encourage clients to focus not on an abstract idea of what the "best" culture is but on what is strongest, most reliable, and most effective within your current culture. We believe that is the quickest and most effective way to get the best out of people.

Epilogue

Culture is never all good or all bad. As long as we keep it part of our focus, it will enable us to sustain our distinctiveness over time, whatever the future holds.