

# EXECUTIVE BOOK SUMMARIES

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

### Simon Sinek

*A trained ethnographer, Simon Sinek has discovered some remarkable patterns about how people think, act and communicate, and the environments in which they operate at their natural best. He has devoted his life to sharing his thinking in order to help other leaders and organizations inspire action.*

# The Infinite Game

## THE NUTSHELL

Portfolio / Penguin 2019

### Finite and Infinite Games

If there are at least two players, a game exists. There are two kinds of games: finite games and infinite games. Finite games are played by known players. They have fixed rules and there is an agreed-upon objective that, when reached, ends the game. Infinite games, in contrast, are played by known and unknown players. There are no exact or agreed-upon rules. Infinite games have infinite time horizons and because there is no finish line, no practical end to the game, there is no such thing as “winning” an infinite game. In an infinite game, the primary objective is to keep playing, to perpetuate the game. The game of business fits the very definition of an infinite game.

### Just Cause

When we play in a finite game, we play the game to win. Even if we hope to simply play well and enjoy the game, we do not play to lose. The motivation to play in an infinite game is completely different—the goal is not to win, but to keep playing. It is to advance something bigger than ourselves or our organizations. And any leader who wishes to lead in the Infinite Game must have a crystal-clear Just Cause. A Just Cause is a specific vision of a future state that does not yet exist; a future state so appealing that people are willing to make sacrifices in order to help advance toward that vision.

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## **Cause. No Cause.**

A true Just Cause is deeply personal to those who hear it, and it must be deeply personal to those who espouse it. The more personal it is for people, the more likely our passions will be stoked to help advance it. If the words of a Just Cause are used simply to boost a brand image, attract passionate employees or help drive some near-term goal, the impact will be short lived. As soon as we start working at an organization or interacting with its people, we will quickly find out whether they are offering us a Just Cause they truly believe in or just hollow words.

## **Keeper of the Cause**

Leaders in the Infinite Game will be better equipped to fulfill their responsibilities if they understand that they are stepping into the role of a “Chief Vision Officer,” or CVO. That is the primary job of the person who sits at the pointy end of the spear. They are the holder, communicator and protector of the vision. Their job is to ensure that all clearly understand the Just Cause and that all other C-level executives direct their efforts to advancing the Cause inside the organization. It’s not that an infinite-minded leader is entirely unconcerned with the organization’s finite interests. Rather, as the keeper of the Cause, they take accountability for deciding when short-term finite costs are worth it to advance the infinite vision. They think beyond the bottom line.

## **The Responsibility of Business (Revised)**

The responsibility of business is to use its will and resources to advance a cause greater than itself, protect the people and places in which it operates and generate more resources so that it can continue doing all those things for as long as possible. An organization can do whatever it likes to build its business so long as it is responsible for the consequences of its actions.

## **Will and Resources**

Unlike resources, which are ultimately limited, we can generate an endless supply of will. For this reason, organizations that choose to operate with a bias for will are ultimately more resilient than those who prioritize resources. When hard times strike (and hard times always strike), in companies with a bias for will, the people are much more likely to rally together to protect each other, the company, the resources and their leaders. They do this not because they are told to, but because they choose to. This is what happens when the will of the people is strong.

## **Trusting Teams**

When we work on a Trusting Team we feel safe to express vulnerability. We feel safe to raise our hands and admit we made a mistake, be honest about shortfalls in performance, take responsibility for our behavior and ask for help. Asking for help is an example of an act that reveals vulnerability. However, when on a Trusting Team, we do so with the confidence that our boss or our colleagues will be there to support us. When we are not on a Trusting Team, when we do not feel like we can express any kind of vulnerability at work, we often feel forced to lie, hide and fake to compensate. Without Trusting

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Teams, all the cracks in an organization are hidden or ignored. If that continues for any length of time, it will compound and spread until things start to break. Trusting Teams, therefore, are essential to the smooth running of any organization.

## **Ethical Fading**

Ethical fading is a condition in a culture that allows people to act in unethical ways in order to advance their own interests, often at the expense of others, while falsely believing that they have not compromised their own moral principles. Ethical fading often starts with small, seemingly innocuous transgressions that, when left unchecked, continue to grow and compound. Cultures that place excessive focus on quarterly or annual financial performance can put intense pressure on people to cut corners, bend rules and make other questionable decisions in order to hit the targets set for them. The best antidote—and inoculation—against fading is an infinite mindset.

## **Worthy Rival**

A Worthy Rival is another player in the game worthy of comparison. Worthy Rivals may be players in our industry or outside our industry. They may be our sworn enemies, our sometimes collaborators or colleagues. It doesn't even matter whether they are playing with a finite or an infinite mindset, so long as we are playing an infinite game. Regardless of who they are or where we find them, the main point is that they do something (or many things) as well as or better than us. Traditional competition forces us to take on an attitude of winning, whereas A Worthy Rival inspires us to take on an attitude of improvement. The former focuses our attention on the outcome, the latter focuses our attention on process.

## **Existential Flexibility**

Existential Flexibility is the Capacity to initiate an extreme disruption to a business model or strategic course in order to more effectively advance a Just Cause. It is an infinite-minded appreciation for the unpredictable that allows them to make these kinds of changes. Where the finite-minded player fears things that are new or disruptive, the infinite-minded player revels in them. When an infinite-minded leader with a clear sense of Cause looks to the future and sees that the path they are on will significantly restrict their ability to advance their Just Cause, they flex.

## **The Courage to Lead**

Courageous Leaders are strong because they know they don't have all the answers and they don't have total control. They do, however, have each other and a Just Cause to guide them. It is the weak leader who takes the expedient route. They are the ones who think they have all the answers or try to control all the variables. When leaders exercise the Courage to Lead, the people who work inside their organization will start to reflect that same courage. Like children who mirror their parents, so too do employees mirror their leaders. Leaders who prioritize themselves over the group breed cultures of employees who prioritize their own advancement over the health of the company. The Courage to Lead begets the Courage to Lead.