



**Premise** – In The Infinite Game, Simon Sinek encourages you, the reader to recognise that we have been conditioned to think life is about winning (and losing), a finite paradigm. He lays out that in most situations, including business, this is not a valid or successful premise.

We are much better off leading with an infinite mindset. A mindset that requires us to follow five interconnected principles: Advance a **Just Cause**; Build **Trusting Teams**; Study Your **Worthy Rivals**; Prepare for **Existential Flexibility**; and Demonstrate the **Courage to Lead**.

By leading this way we can challenge the status quo and replace it with a reality that is vastly more conducive to our deep-seated human need to feel safe, contribute to something bigger than ourselves and to provide for our families. A reality that works for our best interest as individuals, as companies, as communities and as a species.

Please forward this summary to friends / colleagues for their private educational purposes.

Obviously, I still recommend that you purchase and read it plus other seminal books I've summarised, including ...

Happy reading,

Wiet Pruim

 Quest Worldwide



## Finite and Infinite Games

If there are at least two players, a game exists. And there are two types 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. Football, for example, is a finite game.

**Infinite games**, in contrast, are played by known and unknown players. There are no exact agreed-upon rules. Though there may be conventions or laws that govern how the players conduct themselves, within those boundaries, the players can operate however they want.

Infinite games have infinite time horizons. And because there is a known 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.

When we lead with a finite mindset in an infinite game, it leads to all kinds of problems, the most common of which include the decline of trust, cooperation and innovation. Leading with an infinite mindset in an infinite game, in contrast, really does move us in a better direction. Groups that adopt an infinite mindset enjoy vastly higher levels of trust, cooperation and innovation and all the subsequent benefits. If we are all, at various times, players in infinite games, then it is in our interest to learn how to recognise the game we are in and what it takes to lead with an infinite mindset.

The game of business fits the very definition of an infinite game. The game of business has no finish line.

In finite games, there is a single agreed upon metric that separates the winner from the loser. In infinite games, there are multiple metrics, which is why we can never declare a winner.

In the Infinite Game, the true value of an organisation cannot be measured by the success it has achieved based on an arbitrary set of metrics over arbitrary time frames. The true value of an organisation is measured by the desire others have to contribute to that organisation's ability to keep succeeding, not just during the time they are there, but well beyond their tenure.

Too many leaders today are building companies that are simply not made to last. They are simply not leading with an Infinite Mindset.

## Lead with an Infinite Mindset

There are three factors we must always consider when deciding how we want to lead:

1. We don't get to choose whether a game is finite or infinite.
2. We do get to choose whether we want to join the game.
3. Should we choose to join the game, we can choose whether we want to play with a finite or infinite mindset.

Any leader who wants to adopt an infinite mindset must follow five essential practices:

- Advance a **Just Cause**
- Build **Trusting Teams**
- Study your **Worthy Rivals**
- Prepare for **Existential Flexibility**
- Demonstrate the **Courage to Lead**

To fully equip an organisation for a long and healthy life in the Infinite game, we must do it all.

## Advance a Just Cause

When we play in a finite game, we play the game to win. We do not play to lose. The motivation to play in an infinite game is totally different – the goal is not to win, but to keep playing. It is to advance something bigger than ourselves or our organisations. 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.

“Winning” provides a temporary thrill or victory; an intense, but fleeting, boost to our self-confidence. To get that feeling again, we need to try to win again. However, when there is a Just Cause, a reason to come to work that is bigger than any particular win, our days take on more meaning and feel more fulfilling.

A Just Cause is not the same as our WHY. A WHY comes from the past. It is an origin story. A Just Cause is about the future. It defines where we are going. It describes the world we hope to live in and will commit to help build. We know a Cause is just when we commit to it with the confidence that others will carry on our legacy.

Many of the organisations we work for now already have some sort of purpose, vision or mission statement (or all of them). However, the vast majority of them would not qualify as a Just Cause.

## Just Cause continued

A Just Cause must be:

- **For something** – affirmative and optimistic.
- **Inclusive** – open to all those who would like to contribute.
- **Service oriented** – for the primary benefit of others.
- **Resilient** – able to endure political, technological and cultural change; and
- **Idealistic** – big, bold and ultimately achievable.

In the Infinite Game of business, a Just Cause must be greater than the products we make and the services we offer. Our products and services are some of the things we use to advance our Cause. They are not themselves the Cause.

It is important to celebrate our victories, but we cannot linger on them. For the Infinite Game is still going and there is much work to be done. Those victories must serve as milestones of our progress towards an idealised future and serve as inspiration to keep moving forward.

### When you have your Just Cause, write it down

Without finding the words for the Just Cause and writing them down, it dramatically increases the risk that, in time, that Cause will be diluted or disappear altogether. And without the Just Cause, an organisation starts to function like a ship without a compass – it veers off course.

## Cause. No Cause.

**Moon shots are not a Just Cause.** It is easy to mistake a Big Hairy Audacious Goal for a Just Cause because they can indeed be incredibly inspiring and can often take years to achieve. But after the moon shot has been achieved the game continues.

**Being the best is not a Just Cause.** “Being the best” and statements like that are egocentric statements that place the company as the primary subject (and thus the primary beneficiary). By putting the egocentric statement first, it directs leaders to focus their efforts inwards and not on the actual people who may buy the product. A Just Cause should direct the business model, not the other way.

**Growth is not a Just Cause.** Money is the fuel to advance a Cause, it is not a Cause. The reason to grow is so that we have more fuel to advance.

**Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is not a Just Cause.** And a company is not cause driven because they sponsor walkathons, donate to charity or give employees time off to volunteer. “Cause-related work” is not something an organisation does on the side; it is the core of their very being.

## Keeper of the Cause

The responsibility of every C-level executive is baked into their title. What they are required to do, what they are required to oversee, is right in their title. So it begs the question, what exactly is a Chief EXECUTIVE Officer?

The lack of a clear standard for the role and responsibility of the CEO in our organisations is one of the reasons we find too many leaders of companies playing the finite game when they should at least be thinking about the Infinite Game. In too many cases, it's their title that hasn't properly set them up for the job they have.

Words matter. They give direction and meaning to things.

Leaders in the Infinite Game will be better equipped to fulfil their responsibilities if they understand that they are stepping into the role of “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 projector 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 their organisation.

## The Responsibility of Business (Revised)

Business today is subject to a dizzying rate of change. And all that seems to be taking its toll. The average life of a company in the 50's was just over 60 years. Today it is less than 20 years. According to a 2017 study by Credit Suisse, disruptive technology is the reason for the steep decline in company life span. However, disruptive technologies are not a new phenomenon.

“Disruption” is likely not the cause of the challenge, it's a symptom of a more insidious root cause. It is not technology, that explains failure; it is less about technology, per se, and more about a leaders' failure to envision the future of the business as the world changes around them. It is the result of short-sightedness. And short-sightedness is an inherent condition of leaders who play with a finite mindset.

If our goal is to build companies that can keep playing for lifetimes to come, then we must stop automatically thinking of shareholders as owners, and executives must stop thinking they work solely for them. A healthier way for all shareholders to view themselves is as contributors, be they near-term or long-term focused.

Logically, for a company to get bigger, stronger or better at what they do, executives must ensure that the benefit provided by investors' money or employees' hard work should, as Adam Smith pointed out, go first to those who buy from the company. When that happens, it is easier for the company to sell more, charge more, build a more loyal customer base and make more money for the company and its investors alike. In addition, executives need to go back to seeing themselves as stewards of great institutions that serve all stakeholders. The impact of which serves the wants, needs and desires of all those involved in a company's success, not just a few.

It is now self-evident that we need a new definition of the responsibility of business that better aligns with the idea that business is an infinite game. A definition that understands that money is a result not a purpose. A definition that gives employees and the people who lead them the feeling that their work has value beyond the money they make for themselves, their companies or their shareholders.

In order to increase the infinite value to our nation, our economy, and all the companies that play the game, the definition of the responsibility of business can be stated as:

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 the resources so that it can continue doing all these things as long as possible. An organisation can do whatever it likes to build its business so long as it is responsible for the consequences of its actions.

The three pillars – to advance a purpose, protect people and generate a profit – seem to be essential in the Infinite Game.

## Will and Resources

In any game, there are always two currencies required to play – will and resources. Resources are tangible and easily measured. When we talk about resources, we’re usually talking about money. Resources generally come from outside sources, like customers or investors, and represent the sum of all the financial metrics that contribute to the health of the organisation.

Will, in contrast, is intangible and harder to measure. When we talk about will, we’re talking about the feelings people have when they come to work. Will encompasses morale, motivation, inspiration, commitment, desire to engage, desire to offer discretionary effort and so on. Will generally comes from inside sources like the quality of leadership and the clarity and strength of the Just Cause. Will represents the sum of all the human elements that contribute to the health of an organisation.

Unlike resources, which are ultimately limited, we can generate endless supply of will. For this reason organisations that choose to operate with a bias for will are ultimately more resilient than those that prioritise resources.

## Build Trusting Teams

There is a difference between a group of people who work together and a group of people who trust each other. In a group of people who simply work together, relationships are mostly transactional, based on a mutual desire to get things done. This doesn’t preclude us from liking the people we work with or even enjoying our jobs. But those things do not add up to a Trusting Team. Trust is a feeling. Just as it is impossible for a leader to demand that we be happy or inspired, a leader cannot order us to trust them or each other. For the leading of trust to develop, we must feel safe being vulnerable.

When we work in 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 behaviour and ask for help.

“Trust is stacking and layering of small moments and reciprocal vulnerability over time.” “Trust and vulnerability grow together, and to betray one is to destroy both.”

To deny the connection between feelings and performance is a finite-minded way of looking at leadership.

The US Navy Seals discovered that a high performer of low trust – is a toxic team member. If the Seals, who are some of the highest performing teams in the world, prioritise trust before performance, then why do we still think (individual) performance matters in business?

Good leaders don’t automatically favour low performers of high trust nor do they immediately dump high performers of low trust. If someone’s performance is struggling or if they are acting in a way that is negatively impacting team dynamics, the primary question a leader needs to ask is, “Are they coachable?” Our goal, as leaders, is to ensure that our people have the skills – technical skills, human skills or leadership skills – so that they are equipped to work to their natural best and be a valuable asset to the team.

### Culture = Values + Behaviours

We must model the behaviour we want to see, actively incentivise the kinds of behaviours that build trust and give people responsible freedom and the support they need to flourish in their jobs. It is the combination of what we value and how we act that sets the culture of the company.

People will trust their leaders when their leaders do the things that make them feel psychologically safe.

Build **Trusting Teams** continued

In weak cultures, people find safety in the rules. In strong cultures, people find safety in relationships. Strong relationships are the foundation of high-performing teams. And all high-performing teams start with trust.

In the Infinite Game, however, we need more than strong, trusting, high-performing teams today. We need a system that will ensure that trust and performance can endure over time. If leaders are responsible for creating the environment that fosters trust, then are we building a bench of leaders who know how to do that?

### How to Train a leader

The ability to succeed is not what makes someone a leader. Exhibiting the qualities of leadership is what makes someone an effective leader. Qualities like honesty, integrity, courage, resilience, perseverance, judgment and decisiveness, as the Marines have learned after years of trial and error, are more likely to engender the kind of trust and cooperation that, over the course of time, increase the likelihood that a team will succeed more often than it fails. A bias for will before resources, trust before performance, increases the probability a team, will perform at higher levels over time.

One of the primary job of leaders is to make new leaders. To help grow the kind of leaders who know how to build organisations equipped for the Infinite Game.

Leaders are not responsible for results; leaders are responsible for the people who are responsible for the results. And the best way to drive performance in an organisation is to create an environment in which information can flow freely, mistakes can be highlighted and help can be offered and received. In short an environment in which people feel safe among their own. This is the responsibility of a leader.

## 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.

Ethical fading is not an event. It doesn’t just suddenly arrive like a switch was flipped. It’s more like an infection that festers over time.

With each transgression that is tolerated, we pave the way for more and bigger ethical transgressions. Little by little, we change the norms inside a culture of what is acceptable behaviour. “If everyone else is doing it, then it must be okay.”

Add an unbalanced reward structure that focuses on performance and ignores trust, and the ethical lapses start to move as if they were sliding down a Slip ‘N’ Slide coated in Teflon covered in baby oil until they reach full-blown ethical fading at the end.

When these seemingly minor transgressions become pervasive in culture, however it is a sign of ethical fading. Remember, the very definition of ethical fading is engaging in unethical behaviour while believing that we are still acting in line with our own moral or ethical code.

The best antidote, and inoculation, against ethical fading is an infinite mindset. Leaders who give their people a Just Cause to advance and give them the opportunity with a Trusting Team to advance it will build a culture in which their people can work towards short-term goals while also considering the morality, ethics and wider impacts of the decisions they make to reach those goals.

The pursuit of the Just Cause is a journey of constant self-improvement. Constant improvement refers to every facet of the organisation, including its culture and the standards by which the culture operates.

Ethical decisions are not based on what’s best for the short-term. They are based on the “right thing to do.”

## Study Your Worthy Rivals

To anyone who has spent time watching or playing games and sports, the notion of finite competition where one player or side beats the other to earn a title or prize is familiar. Indeed, to most of us, it is so ingrained in the way we think we automatically adopt an us versus them attitude whenever there are other players in the field, regardless of the nature of the game. If we are a player in an infinite game, however, we have to stop thinking of other players as competitors to be beaten and start thinking of them as Worthy Rivals who can help us become better players.

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 matter whether they are playing with a finite or infinite mindset, so long as we are playing with an infinite mindset. 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. They make a better product, command greater loyalty, are better leaders, or act with a clearer sense of purpose than we do. We don’t need to admire everything about them, agree with them, or even like them. We simply acknowledge that they have strengths and abilities from which we could learn a thing or two.

We choose them to be our Worthy Rivals because there is something about them that reveals to us our weaknesses and pushes us to constantly improve ... which is essential if we want to be strong enough to stay in the game.

Traditional competition forces us to take an attitude of winning. 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. That simple shift in perspective immediately changes how we see our own business. It is the focus on process and constant improvement that helps reveal new skills and boost resilience. An excessive focus on beating our competition not only gets exhausting over time, it can actually stifle innovation.

Worthy Rivals can help us:

- Get better at WHAT we do
- Get clearer on WHY we do it

### Two watch-outs

Cause Blindness is when we become so wrapped up in our Cause or so wrapped up in the “wrongness” of the other player’s Cause, that we fail to recognise their strengths or our weaknesses. Cause Blindness means that we are unable to see that we can actually learn from them.

Don’t confuse losing your Worthy Rival with Winning the Game. When our most important Worthy Rival, the one who pushes more than any other, drops out of the game, it does not mean that there are others on the bench waiting to immediately rush in to play either. It can take years for a new or different Rival or Rivals to replace them. The advanced player in the Indefinite Game understands this and works to remain humble at the loss of a major Rival.

## Prepare for 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 player’s appreciation for the unpredictable that allows them to make these kind of changes.

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.

Prepare for **Existential Flexibility** continued

Without that sense of infinite vision, strategic shifts, even extreme ones, tend to be reactive or opportunistic. Existential Flexibility is always offensive. It is not to be confused with the defensive manoeuvring many companies undergo to stay alive in the face of new technology or changing consumer habits.

An Existential Flex doesn’t happen at the founding of a company, it happens when the company is fully formed and functioning. To all finite-minded observers, it is existential because the leader is risking the apparent certainty of the current, profitable path, with the uncertainty of a new path – which could lead to a company’s decline or demise. To the finite-minded player, such a move is not worth the risk. To infinite-minded players, however, staying on the current path is the bigger risk. Failure to flex, they believe, will significantly restrict their ability to advance their Just Cause. They fear staying the course may even lead to the eventual demise of the organisation.

When a visionary leader makes an existential flex, to the outside world it appears they can predict the future. They can’t. They do, however operate with a clear and fixed vision of a future that does not yet exist – their Just Cause – and constantly scan for ideas, opportunities or technologies that can help them advance towards that vision.

An infinite-minded leader with a Just Cause looks outside their industry and miles beyond the horizon – to a place that requires imagination.

## Demonstrate the Courage To Lead

The Courage to Lead is a willingness to take risks for the good of an unknown future. And the risks are real. For it is much easier to tinker with the month, the quarter, or year, but to make decisions with an eye to a distant future is much more difficult. Such decisions may indeed cost us in the short term. It may cost us money or our jobs. It takes the Courage to Lead to operate to a standard that is higher than the law – to a standard of ethics.

It takes the Courage to Lead to make decisions counter to the current standards of business and it takes the Courage to Lead to ignore pressure of outside parties who are not invested in or believers in our Just Cause.

Courage in the Infinite Game, is not solely about the actions we take. Even leaders who operate with a finite mindset can take risks. Courage as it relates to leading with an infinite mindset, is the willingness to completely change our perception of how the world works.

More and more people say they want to work for a purpose-driven organisation, especially Millennials and Gen Zers. But without committed, infinite-minded leaders willing to challenge accepted norms of how the working world works, statements of Cause are just feel-good marketing – stuff a company may say to curry favour with people inside or outside the organisation, but may not actually believe in or do themselves.

The courage to see the Infinite Game – to see the purpose of business as something more heroic than simply making money, even if it’s unpopular with the finite players around us – is hard.

Playing the infinite game is not a checklist, it’s a mindset.

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. 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 organisation will start to respect that courage.

**The Courage to Lead begets the Courage to Lead.**