

The Infinite Game



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I. FINITE VERSUS INFINITE GAMES

A. There are two types of games:

1. Finite games have known players, fixed rules, and an agreed-upon objective.
2. Infinite games have known and unknown players, the rules are changeable, and the objective is to keep playing the game.

B. There is no such thing as winning an infinite game. There is simply running out of the will or the resources to play.

C. Problems arise when you pit a finite player versus an infinite player, because they make profoundly different strategic choices.

D. We are surrounded by infinite games, but most of us do not know how to lead in an infinite game.

E. In an infinite game, there is no such thing as winning; there is only ahead and behind.

F. The only true competitor in an infinite game is ourselves.

G. Leading an infinite game requires five things.

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II. A JUST CAUSE

- A. A true just cause is a cause so just that we would be willing to sacrifice to advance the cause.
- B. Winning the finite games that are contained within the infinite game does not mean the cause is over. It just means one obstacle has been removed.
- C. It is something we will never actually achieve, but we will die trying.
- D. A just cause has to be in the affirmative. You cannot stand against something; you have to stand for something.
- E. A just cause has to be resilient – strong enough to withstand cultural, political, and technological change.
- F. A just cause has to be inclusive – serving as an invitation to anyone who would like to contribute.
- G. A just cause has to be service oriented – so the primary benefit of anyone’s contribution goes to others besides the contributor. Any benefit they derive is secondary.

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III. TRUSTING TEAMS

- A. There is a difference between liking your job and loving your job. Liking is rational; loving is emotional.
- B. Leaders are responsible for creating an environment in which people feel they can be their best selves.
- C. Creating an environment where people can work at their natural best leads to trusting teams.
- D. If you do not have trusting teams, you have a group of people who show up to work lying, hiding, and faking. The customers and company suffer.
- E. We do not trust people to follow rules; we trust people to know when to break them.
- F. The infinite game is bigger than simply making the short-term goal.

IV. A WORTHY RIVAL

- A. A worthy rival exists to push you to make you better; you are not competing against them but with them. You can have worthy rivals within your own organization.

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- B. There are also tactical rivals, other companies that do something better than you that make you go improve your product.

- C. Then you have existential rivals – ideological rivalries where someone’s worldview is completely the opposite of yours, which drives you to keep going. You cannot beat them, but you can outlast them.

V. EXISTENTIAL FLEXIBILITY

- A. You may never have to go through this, but if your entire business model were challenged, would you be willing to blow up your own business?

- B. If you are not willing to make an existential change, the industry may do it for you.

VI. THE COURAGE TO LEAD

- A. The pressures around us to focus on the short term are overwhelming.

- B. It takes remarkable courage to lead in the infinite game.

VII. AN INFINITE LIFE