

Book Review

Our Iceberg Is Melting by John Kotter from **Radical HR.**

An unexpectedly powerful parable about the courage to lead through change.

At first glance, *Our Iceberg Is Melting* seems too simple. A story about penguins, an iceberg, and an impending threat. But as I read (and re-read), I realised that's the brilliance of it. How could this fable give us powerful learnings about change? John Kotter—alongside co-author Holger Rathgeber—has distilled the complex, emotional, and often messy process of leading change into a narrative that's accessible, engaging, and surprisingly relatable.

The story follows a colony of emperor penguins who discover that their iceberg, their home, is quite literally melting beneath them. What unfolds is not just a fable, it's a mirror. Through characters like Fred the curious observer, Alice the courageous leader, Louis, the head leaders and NoNo the predictable naysayer, Kotter reveals the psychological and cultural patterns that show up in every organisation facing uncertainty or transformation.

Why it matters

This isn't a book about strategy frameworks or complex models—it's about what it takes to *move people*. And that's where its magic lies. The narrative gently walks us through Kotter's well-known 8-step change model, but it never feels preachy. Instead, it invites us to pause and reflect:

- Who are the people in our own 'penguin colony'?
- What are we standing on that might no longer be solid?
- Where are we resisting the signs of change because it feels safer to pretend everything's fine?

As someone who's worked alongside senior leaders navigating significant transformation, I found this book stripped away the noise and brought me back to the core truth, and something I speak into passionately (and often controversially) - real change is about people first. Not processes. Not plans. Not posturing. People.

When to read it

I often recommend this book to teams who are right on the edge—aware that something needs to shift, but unsure how to begin. It works beautifully as a shared read in internal book clubs, leadership workshops or planning offsites. Because it's short and such an easy read, even the most change-fatigued leader can engage with it.

What makes this book powerful is its re-readability. The simplicity of the story means you'll find different things each time, depending on the context you're in and the kind of change you're trying to lead. It's a gentle nudge toward courageous, collective action.

Bottom line?

This book is a parable with substance. It reminds us that change doesn't need to be overwhelming, but it does need to be seen, acknowledged, and acted on. In a time when so many leaders are navigating shifting landscapes, *Our Iceberg Is Melting* offers a clear, human-centered call to action:

- 👉 Pay attention.
- 👉 Bring people with you.
- 👉 Don't wait until the cracks are too big to ignore.

One of my favourite reflections from the book:

"The penguins didn't need all the answers before they took the first step. They just needed to see that staying still wasn't an option."

Highly recommended—for teams, for leaders, and for anyone standing on uncertain ground.

If you are looking to re-imagine how you engage with your people and create workplaces that inspire and drive productivity, I'd love to buy you a coffee and chat more!