



Book Fusion Leadership

Unlocking the Subtle Forces that Change People and Organizations

Richard L. Daft and Robert H. Lengel
Berrett-Koehler, 1998

Recommendation

Richard L. Daft and Robert H. Lengel present a new model of leadership. They contrast fusion leadership with traditional fission leadership that is based upon dividing the workplace into roles and tasks based on position and function. The book draws on many of the new ideas in management and leadership based on notions of chaos, change, creativity, intuition, personal empowerment, dialogue, future search, and other principles. It mixes new science, spirituality and New Age thinking. While some readers may view these ideas as a welcome change from the traditional, rational approach to management, others may find them overly mushy and touchy-feely. However, within the growing genre of soft-leadership style books, it is well written and well organized. *BooksInShort* recommends this book to executives interested in non-traditional leadership approaches.

Take-Aways

- In fusion leadership, you release subtle forces in yourself and others to make the organization more powerful and effective.
- The six subtle forces are: mindfulness, vision, heart, communication, courage and integrity.
- In a fusion-based organization, you unlock each person's creativity and commitment.
- A fusion-based organization can respond much more quickly as the environment changes.
- A fusion leader helps motivate everyone by appealing to employees' deeper yearnings to do meaningful work and to contribute creatively.
- Fusion leadership is the opposite of the traditional fission leadership style based on separating people and controlling operations in a rational way.
- Fusion leaders bring people together and empower them.
- Fusion leaders use a more intuitive, creative style of inspiring others.
- The goal of fusion leadership is to balance strong organizational forces with the subtle personal forces that exist in everyone.
- Be a transformational leader rather than a transactional leader.

Summary

The Value of Fusion Leadership

Today organizations need fusion leadership so they can respond to change with more flexibility and adaptability. Commonly, managers feel frustrated, and often fail, when they try to promote change. This is particularly true when numerous previous efforts to create change have failed. These failures include attempts at "restructuring, re-engineering, quality improvement, technology, empowerment, incentive systems and downsizing." Often, these campaigns failed because they were based on the use of "objective and rational systems for change." Failure can also stem from instituting change with an "us and them approach," with leaders and managers directing change and expecting staff to change. For real change to occur, managers and executives have to fuse with others in the organization. Total change involves everyone.

“Fusion leadership is not about new skills as much as it is about remembering and unlocking potentials that have been there all along.”

Another advantage of fusion leadership is its appeal to employees’ deep yearnings to do meaningful work. People want to develop their creative potential and truly contribute to the organization. This approach gives people the opportunity to express the deeper subtle qualities that promote personal growth. Given the responsibility for self-development and self-management, people will self-organize. For instance, they will form enthusiastic teams and work groups, through which they can change themselves and the organization. Thereby, the organization can keep up with the changing marketplace.

The Basic Characteristics of Fusion Leadership

A fusion leadership style is the opposite of the fission leadership style. The fission approach corresponds to the way an atomic bomb explodes, by splitting atoms. Fission management is based on a formal control system that divides up employees and rigidly separates individuals and units within the company. It emphasizes an organization that runs like a machine, where emotion has little role. By contrast, the fusion approach is based on the principles of nuclear fusion, where the nuclei of atoms join together, resulting in five times as much energy as when fission occurs. This energy can be released in an organization when you use a fusion management style.

“Real change occurs when managers fuse with other levels and departments and everyone changes together.”

Fusion management joins people together to create "connections and partnerships." You link them so they can share information and responsibilities across organizational divisions. Thus, you help create unity. People feel they are part of a whole, rather than feeling separated by the boundaries of divisions, departments and organizational levels. Unified, people are more eager to work together and support the organization. They are less likely to resist organizational change.

The Subtle Forces that Power Fusion Leadership

An effective fusion leader needs to balance the strong forces of the organization (achieving financial results, meeting budgets and managing personnel) with personal subtle forces. These personal forces exist within everyone in the organization, including yourself. These forces include qualities associated with emotion, personality and will, such as passion, enthusiasm and values. The traditional organization typically ignores or downplays these subtle forces and allows strong forces to dominate. You can draw on these subtle forces to create a more balanced organization. The six essential subtle forces which reflect this human potential are:

1. Mindfulness: thinking independently and creatively, and having an open mind.
2. Vision: the "higher purpose" that inspires and motivates people to work together for a goal.
3. Heart: caring, compassion, and other positive emotions that connect people in relationships.
4. Communication: the way you use words and symbols to influence others, and how you listen and pay attention to what they think and feel.
5. Courage: being willing to be adventurous, lead, take risks, stand up for what you believe, and make mistakes as you learn.
6. Integrity: that commitment to being honest, trustworthy, and of service to others, so your focus is on giving to the organization, rather than thinking about yourself.

The Need to Fuse the Individual and Organization Together

To be a fusion leader, you need to develop the subtle qualities in yourself and others, and to create a linkage between the individual and the organization. To do this, draw out the subtle individual forces of mindfulness, vision, heart, communication, courage and integrity. This will inspire personal creativity, purposefulness, enthusiasm, the break-up of old divisions, greater awareness, trust and a commitment to serve others. As these personal traits are inspired, they draw people together in a more positive organizational culture where the "hearts and minds of individuals are fused with real needs of the organization and environment."

“Fusion is a metaphor for a certain style of management. Fusion is about joining, coming together, creating connections and partnerships. Fusion is achieving a sense of unity, coming to perceive others as part of the same whole rather than as separate.”

Events at the Ciba-Geigy agricultural chemical plant in Canada show how fusion leadership works. The plant was experiencing low productivity, personal rivalries and conflicts between divisions. Gerry Rich, the new manager, worked on breaking down old boundaries, inspiring extended dialogue and encouraging people to exercise their creativity and share with others. He promoted leadership throughout the plant. The result was a more productive, harmonious company.

How to Promote the Fusion Process

To promote the fusion process, become a transformational leader, rather than a transactional leader. A transactional leadership style fits the old fission model, since the transactional manager uses a logical, rational approach to control his relationship with employees. Transactional leadership is based on having a detailed knowledge of work processes and micromanaging. In contrast, as a transformational leader, you don't need to concern yourself with analyzing and controlling employees' specific actions. Instead, you give them the "big picture." You draw everyone together and provide, "common ground, vision, and larger meaning." Then, the employees themselves can act to help the organization achieve the big picture.

Developing the Six Subtle Forces through Personal Fusion

To become a fusion leader, you first have to develop the six subtle forces in yourself. Second, join these forces with the more rational qualities associated with traditional management. In this way, you combine all the qualities of humanness - physical, mental, emotional and spiritual - to become a more complete and effective leader.

“The power of fusion is that it can release a set of subtle forces from within individuals that have far-reaching impact on organizational empowerment and change.”

Think of this as a process of combining the centered, grounded and wise qualities of the monk with the focus of the warrior who is in action to achieve a mission. Combining who you are with action means applying your essential human qualities to effect organizational change and improvement. In the same way that you combine your warrior and monk qualities, combine your exterior and interior selves. The exterior is the conscious, thinking, ego self, focused on the external world. The interior is the unconscious, feeling, or essential self, the source of creativity and emotional power.

“Within organizations, unlocking the subtle forces means employing often underutilized parts of human beings, including intellectual, emotional, and spiritual abilities and understandings.”

Once you are in touch with this inner power, draw on these qualities to lead your organization to change. Use your "inner compass or gyroscope" to guide you. By doing so, you call forth a "deep knowing and strength" which will help you accomplish the things you truly believe are important. With this inner awareness, you will be more able to recognize the potential subtle forces in other people, so you can help employees develop and act on these forces, also. Third, this inner awareness will help you guide effective organizational change by allowing you to integrate the organization's needs with the needs of its people.

“The motivating power of personal subtle forces is that people yearn to use them, to be free to express more of their personal creativity, purpose, risk-taking instincts and enthusiasm.”

To start this change process, let go of your need to be the controlling, logical manager. Reach inward to tap these "deeper resources"

in yourself and others in your organization. As you do, you need two types of knowledge. The first is internal, to tap into your vision for yourself and your department or organization. The second is external, to learn more about how others in the outside world regard these subtle forces. Then, you must combine will with action to put these principles into operation. The formula for achieving personal fusion looks something like this: "Personal Fusion = Knowledge x Will x Action."

Applying the Six Subtle Principles

Mindfulness. Have an open, questioning mind and encourage others to do the same. To this end, develop a "beginner's mind," which is receptive to new ideas and people. Learn to look outside the box. Promote independent thought, which includes constantly questioning the way things are, looking at things in a different way and being receptive to new paradigms. Learn to recognize and appreciate the subtle forces. Notice the intangible qualities that underlie relationships and processes. Remain continually mindful of limitations in the way you perceive the world, because everyone has a different perception of reality.

“A fusion approach breathes life into subtle forces within each person that can become the basis for corporate survival and transformation.”

Vision. Use vision to create a compelling picture of the future, so people focus on the goal or path ahead, rather than being overly concerned with minor difficulties. Create a widely shared vision identified with the whole organization, so people start thinking of "our" company, rather than "their company." Your vision should set forth both a destination and a journey. It can be a first step in pulling people together.

“An organization operating on fusion principles and subtle forces can change faster than its fission-based competitors.”

Heart. Focus on developing your "heart qualities." Caring and compassion are central to creating relationships. This concern with the emotions will help you "feel alive, connected, energized, and in love with life and work." Your enthusiasm will inspire others to feel the same way. Charismatic leaders have this quality, which is closely related to the notion of "being in love." It is associated with listening and really feeling empathy for others and promotes connection and better relationships.

“Personal fusion brings together one's physical and mental abilities with the hidden and often forgotten subtle potentials of mindfulness, vision, heart, courage, communication and integrity.”

Communication. You need to communicate well to share your big picture vision and to advance your relationships. Listening is a key to effective communication. It builds trust and shows others that you are truly concerned about them. Be willing to listen not only to expressed complaints and messages, but to unexpressed feelings and opinions. Whenever you can, use stories, symbols and face-to-face communication, sometimes called "rich conversation," to express your vision.

“Organizational fusion is about the integration of departments, viewpoints and the subtle forces into a self-organizing whole.”

Courage. Cultivate the ability to take risks and be a non-conformist, when necessary. Be willing to break with past traditions, boundaries, expectations and norms. Welcome surprises. Be willing to champion change, which can take many forms: a new idea, product, procedure or organizational improvement. This action-oriented approach means you are willing to move through fear and to accept failure in order to move on to success.

“Transformational leaders do not analyze and control specific behaviors of their subordinates. They engage employees in the big picture that provides common ground, vision and larger meaning.”

Integrity. Finally, you need to develop the quality of integrity, which is based on strong core values, honesty and trust. Integrity is associated with the ideal of "servant leadership," in which you want to serve, affirm and empower others. You want to develop your own higher potential and moral ideals, while helping others build their integrity as well.

Moving from Personal Fusion to Organizational Fusion

By building on these qualities of personal fusion you can work towards organizational fusion. This fusion occurs when you break

down traditional boundaries and draw people together to build stronger relationships. When people in the organization develop their own subtle forces, they can work better together.

You can use a number of techniques to draw people together in envisioning a fusion organization, where people unite around a central shared vision. Strategies include having dialogues, future search conferences and whole-scale change events. These methods bring the members of an organization together across traditional boundaries. Together, they can discuss ideal futures and find ways for the organization to respond to change more effectively.

About the Authors

Richard L. Daft is a professor of Management and the Director of the Center for Change Leadership in the Owen Graduate School of Management at Vanderbilt University. He is the author of two best-selling textbooks: *Organization Theory and Design* and *Management*. **Robert H. Lengel** is the Associate Dean for Executive Education at the University of Texas at San Antonio. He consults with corporate clients, including government agencies, oil and gas companies, the military and financial institutions.
