



Operations Leaders

The Association of Operations Leaders & Innovators

BOOK OF THE MONTH SUMMARY

FOR MEMBERS

OVERVIEW

One Mission

How Leaders Build a Team of Teams

by Chris Fussell and C.W. Goodyear

Recommendation

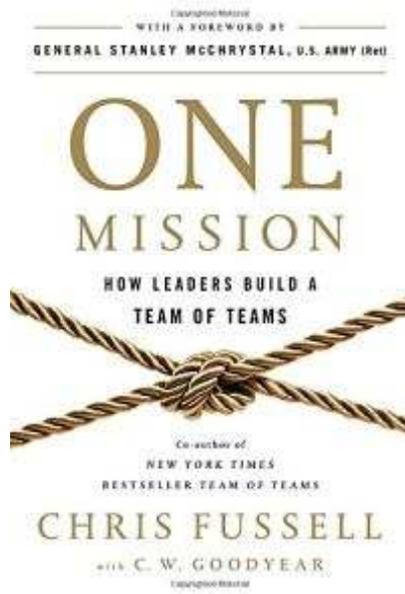
This book illustrates how organizational cultures can integrate corporate networks, leaving an operating system that unifies all teams to focus on a single mission. Former US Navy SEAL Chris Fussell and his co-author C.W. Goodyear extrapolate lessons from the US military and the implementation of a new operating culture to overcome silos of analysts, operators, and leaders. The manual shows executives how to increase information flow and build solutions so that they can spend less time on crisis management and more time on strategic issues.

About the Author

Chris Fussell, a teacher at Yale University and partner at the McChrystal Group Leadership Institute, served as a US Navy SEAL and an aide-de-camp to Lt. Gen. Stanley McChrystal (Ret.), with whom he co-authored Team of Teams. C.W. Goodyear is president of Goodyear Capital Corporation and the former CEO of BHP Billiton.

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One Mission

How Leaders Build a Team of Teams

Chris Fussell and C.W. Goodyear
Portfolio, 2017

Review

This book illustrates how organizational cultures can integrate corporate networks, leaving an operating system that unifies all teams to focus on a single mission. Former US Navy SEAL Chris Fussell and his co-author C.W. Goodyear extrapolate lessons from the US military and the implementation of a new operating culture to overcome silos of analysts, operators, and leaders. The manual shows executives how to increase information flow and build solutions so that they can spend less time on crisis management and more time on strategic issues.

Shifting Organizational Norms

Fussell and Goodyear begin by detailing how German sociologist Max Weber (1864–1920) sought to eliminate the privileges of economic class in late 19th century. His theories described a culture in which power sprang from corporate positions earned through work and merit. Weber wanted to take power from the rich and the nobility – often autocrats born into their positions – and give it to business organizations. He believed people should bend their wills to the “rules of the hierarchy.” Weber created a bureaucratic corporate structure that still functioned as the norm more than a century later.

Today, the authors assert strongly, the norm is shifting. The Internet has changed the time frame for making corporate decisions. Issues arise and demand that organizations make decisions and

find solutions at a pace that strict, hierarchical relationships and lines of communication cannot accommodate.

Fussell and Goodyear describe how the United States military learned this lesson waging war against al-Qaeda, an increasingly agile, cellphone-linked enemy. American military leaders saw that they had to modify their operations to cope with a faster pace of change and with constantly changing change. The authors believe business leaders can apply these military lessons to their physically and culturally dispersed corporations.

“The Hybrid Model”

Fussell and Goodyear explain how the typical bureaucratic, hierarchical structure clarifies lines of communication, but also creates silos that inhibit a company’s adaptability and encourage lone internal groups to form and pursue their own agendas. Bureaucracies, the authors say, often act in self-serving contradiction to – or direct thwarting of – their own corporate goals. Networks are the opposite of the traditional top-down organizational structure. As technologically enabled, ever-changing, “unmoderated” groupings, they adapt far more quickly to change.

Fussell and Goodyear regard neither networks nor hierarchies as optimal formats for today’s companies. Instead, they believe, firms should embrace a hybrid model combining the efficiency and single-mindedness of a bureaucratic structure with a network’s ability to disseminate information quickly and to encourage people to act.

Nerve Centers

In “top-down vertebrate” organizations, such as the military and many companies, the “brain” – or leadership – directs the actions of the “limbs.” The authors chose as an opposite example the invertebrate octopus, which has tentacles that coordinate but working independently of its brain. For example, researchers can sever a tentacle from an octopus, but the tentacle will still try to feed the octopus through where its mouth used to be in relation to the severed limb.

A functioning hybrid model, Fussell and Goodyear say, requires a hierarchical strategy of enabling smaller units to understand corporate strategy in depth so they can operate individually in pursuit of that strategy. This understanding imbues each unit with the company’s core goals and shows each unit how to attain them. For instance, the authors relate how the US military moved to a hybrid structure when it realized the terrorist network al-Qaeda operated more like an octopus, with tentacles that regenerated quickly and functioned even when isolated.

The traditional structure of large companies, Fussell and Goodyear maintain, often has a negative impact on cross-division relations. While 84% of managers interviewed would trust their staff members and bosses, only 9% reported feeling the same about their colleagues. In part, this is because each functional unit interprets corporate objectives through its own lens, especially when the goals are vague. Such interpretation gaps lead to “intertribal conflict,” not to unity. The rivalry makes managers distrust their peers at the same level but cooperate with those above and below them. Distrust hinders communication and efficiency.

For example, the authors believe that such conflict was inevitable in Khowst, Afghanistan. What appeared to be a cohesive group of intelligence analysts from the US Navy SEALs, US Army

Green Berets and Afghan soldiers in fact operated as a cluster of isolated silos. Mutual distrust, poor communication and each group's pursuit of its individual goals eventually led to the abrupt cancellation of certain missions. The units communicated superficially, but "impersonal bureaucratic stove-piping" kept them apart when it mattered.

An "Aligning Narrative"

Fussell and Goodyear believe that changing a corporate or military structure requires a commitment to communicating new goals in a timely way to everyone involved. This means leaving behind the generic ideal of "winning market share" to focus instead on how you will operate together to ensure you attain the market share you seek in unison. This means, according to the authors, shifting your focus toward the process and away from the broader goal.

In the military, this required frequent emails and visits as well as daily forum-style meetings of everyone involved to facilitate communication and efficient problem solving. The process removed tribal walls and further united the disparate groups. The authors underscore that leaders reinforced the group's unification process by sharing stories that exemplified unity.

"Influencers" in Networks

A traditional organizational chart uses "solid lines" to indicate who reports to whom and defines those connections up and down the company hierarchy. A network model, according to the authors, uses "dotted lines" to reveal the connections among people. This kind of schematic can identify the influencers who connect with the largest number of other network members. Identifying influencers – no matter where they fit in the solid-line structure – is important, but it's not always easy.

Fussell and Goodyear cite research by network theorists Robert Cross and Andrew Parker that found a "relatively unimportant member" of an executive group in one organization to be the critical influencer for any project the company assigned to his team. Although this person had only two direct solid-line connections, he was the sole dotted-line connection, via the network, to eight members of the executive team.

Once you identify these hidden gems, the authors say, they can become what Cross and Parker call "boundary spanners" and can, in time, function as the "backbone" of a hybrid organization's informal network connections. As Cross and Parker note, informal connections often prove crucial. Locating different disciplines in the same place – "colocation" – can help strengthen their ties and build trust among members of the different teams. While putting teams together physically is a good start, Fussell and Goodyear point out that technology also can help remove physical distance while allowing boundary spanners to connect with other team members.

Useful Meetings

The authors describe how the military employs a daily Operations & Intelligence (O&I) forum that leverages technology to bring myriad participants together from around the globe. The forum's goal is to encourage staff members to become "boundary connectors" by repeatedly communicating and reinforcing the group's "aligning narrative." The forum's "controller" prepares an agenda displaying all participants with their contact information as well as detailed reports, analysis or raw data links that might be useful to some other participants.

This agenda, Fussell and Goodyear maintain, enables participants to communicate directly with one another prior to the forum if they want to explore relevant information. The “briefers” address why their material matters to the group rather than focusing on any particular audience. Those seeking greater detail can learn more in real-time via a live chat room after the forum. The process makes sure that anyone can voice opinions and insights at the O&I, instead of just giving reports.

The “Half-Life of Intelligence”

In the fast-moving environment of the Task Force, the O&I forums brought together thousands of field operators, support personnel, analysts, and leaders from multiple organizations. Once united in the forums, the authors explain, the participants could quickly integrate or negate new intelligence. In addition, stronger bonds and habits of communication formed among and between the various groups. Strategic leaders at the forum repeatedly stated their appreciation for the teams’ work and reiterated the overall goals of the new structure, which helped build and sustain team bonds. While many participants heard only each other’s voices or saw only their colleagues’ faces, Fussell and Goodyear recount the participants’ recollection of the forum as a “close team.”

“Operating Rhythm”

The timing of the forums – their operating rhythm – reflects the span required between the leaders’ coordination or input and the moment that other people took action. For the Task Force, the time span was 24 hours. With daily forums, leaders and staff members shared information and made connections for further input; field units then executed the designated actions.

Your operating rhythm, the authors notes, may not be daily or even weekly. They recommend basing your operating rhythm on how much time you need from the moment you identify a problem or opportunity to the moment when you need the solution. Consider the speed with which your “operating environment” shifts and how fast your company can meaningfully adapt to change. When assessing changes in your environment, factor in how new technology might alter your marketplace. Consider how quickly companies smaller than yours are making inroads on your market share or gaining appreciative feedback from customers, and how connectivity among clients might outstrip your marketing to them or affect your ability to address their concerns. Unfortunately, Fussell and Goodyear warn, attempting to solve a problem by “doubling down” within a bureaucratic, solid-line organizational structure will be ineffective.

Instead, the authors assert, you’d be better off using an O&I-type approach within a hybrid structure. This would allow you to intermingle “tactical, operational” and “strategic” leadership levels to reduce lost opportunities and the time wasted putting out fires – while still providing the necessary structure for interpreting intelligence and choosing courses of action. The time between forums provides a window for “empowered execution.” Units follow an internal approval process to move from identifying an issue to solving it.

“Decision Space”

Take action between forums, say Fussell and Goodyear. The staff people closest to the problem should act within the boundaries defined by the organization’s leaders. Often people hesitate to

cross defined borders of authority for fear of making mistakes. But with personal accountability – a core element of the decentralized hybrid organization – comes the freedom to act. The antithesis of hesitance, according to the authors, is “deviance” – basically breaking established rules. In the negative, a deviant individual’s action could harm the organization or division. However, leaders should search for those with consistent “positive deviance” and cultivate it. Leaders, the authors say, must accept the challenge of telling the difference.

In 2013, for example, Fussell and Goodyear describe how an air traffic controller likely saved hundreds of passengers’ lives when he allowed a plane to fly within two miles of another aircraft to make an emergency landing. His actions defied regulations but demonstrated what forward-thinking employers want. The air traffic controller exemplified the ability to discover revolutionary resolutions to immediate, critical issues even if those resolutions meant violating the suddenly obsolete boundaries of “formal doctrine.” The first step to creating a culture in which employees feel safe generating such solutions, the authors say, is to create simple guidelines that define absolute never-cross rules and set forth the leaders’ agreed upon definitions of positive and negative deviance.

Creating Connections

Bringing disparate divisions together in a forum can be difficult if you lack the necessary authority. Leaders, Fussell and Goodyear point out, can throw their hierarchical weight around to make it happen. But they teach that facilitating a productive gathering requires something more. And, in this this instance, networks and people who span boundaries can help.

To gain the cooperation of critical partners or external stakeholders, Fussell and Goodyear suggest you identify specific people to serve as liaisons. Seek those between the middle and high levels of the corporation who are highly experienced and are able to represent the company as a whole. The authors suggest that the yardstick for defining “liaison people” is that if you dread the thought of them leaving your organization or quitting their current position, they are probably the right people.

Combining Disparate Experience

Fussell and Goodyear combine a remarkable level of disparate experience to present a worthwhile, helpful and far-reaching program for optimizing communication and strategic and tactical action. The clarity of their highly functional advice serves as its own metaphor for the likely success of their program. As a team, both authors avoid the usual traps associated with former military or corporate leaders who offer advice – like a certain rigidity in tone and method. Together Fussell and Goodyear emphasize flexibility, adaptability, and the willingness to examine your processes ruthlessly and to regard no process as set in stone. Fussell learned these lessons in the heat of warfare, as Goodyear learned amid corporate combat. In both cases, their experience and knowledge enable them to give their readers valuable advice.

About the Author

Chris Fussell, a teacher at Yale University and partner at the McChrystal Group Leadership Institute, served as a US Navy SEAL and an aide-de-camp to Lt. Gen. Stanley McChrystal (Ret.), with whom he co-authored *Team of Teams*. **C.W. Goodyear** is president of Goodyear Capital Corporation and the former CEO of BHP Billiton.

