

# WHEN EXECUTION ISN'T ENOUGH



DECODING **INSPIRATIONAL**  
LEADERSHIP

**CLAUDIO FESER**

Foreword by Manfred Kets de Vries

**WILEY**

# Chapter 3: The Science of Influence

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“Inspirational appeals are the most effective influence tactics in getting people to commit to action.”

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*Leadership is influence.*

—John C. Maxwell

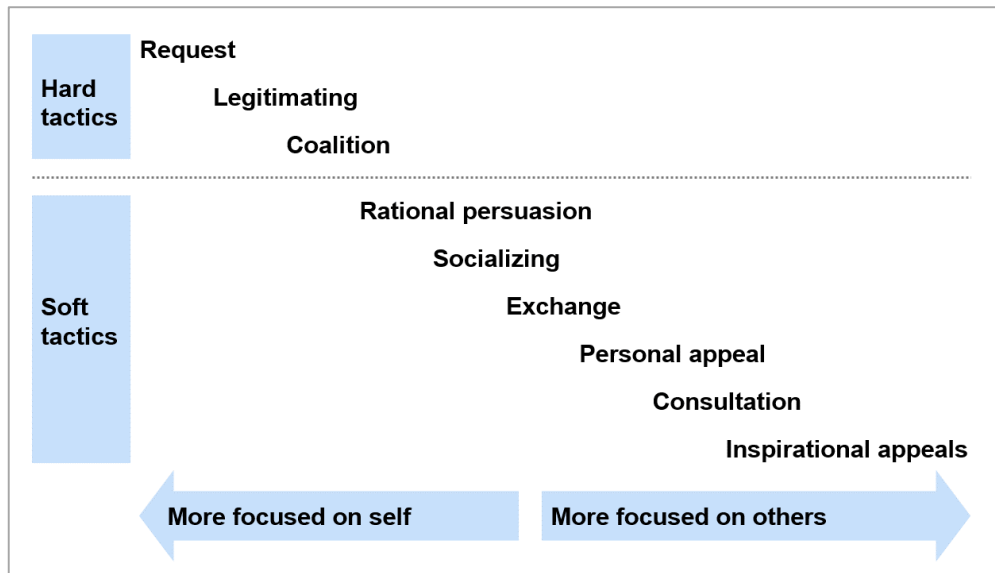
Influence has long been recognized as an essential element of leadership. A commonly used definition of leadership states that leadership is “a process of social influence in which one person is able to enlist the aid and support of others in the accomplishment of a common task.”<sup>1</sup> Influence is a primary social mechanism through which a leader enacts his or her leadership.<sup>2</sup>

Ample literature and research addresses the science of influence. Notably, leaders turn to the theory of influence, based on the principles of reciprocity, commitment, and consistency, social proof, authority, liking, and scarcity, developed by Robert Cialdini,<sup>3</sup> a psychologist at Arizona State University, or to the study of influence tactics by Gary Yukl, a psychologist at the State University of New York at Albany.

In the early 1980s, Kipnis, Schmidt, and Wilkinson initiated one of the main streams of research on influencing behavior.<sup>4</sup> They spearheaded an empirical approach for studying the process of influence by collecting critical incident reports in which people in a work setting described how they “got their way” with someone else in their organization. Leveraging these reports, they developed an instrument called the Profile of Organizational Influence Strategies (POIS)<sup>5</sup> to measure the frequency with which various people within organizations use specific influencing tactics. This original instrument has been used and refined over the last 30 years to provide a solid foundation for our understanding of the influencing behaviors that people actually use in the workplace.<sup>6</sup>

This stream of research has led to the identification of nine influence approaches, that is, inspirational appeals and eight others. Three of them are known as “hard” tactics, and six of them as “soft” tactics. They are shown in Figure 3.1.

Figure 3.1 The Nine Influence Tactics



The hard tactics on the left are simple and straightforward. Leaders carry them out simply by building on their own perspectives. The soft tactics on the right are more complex and require the ability to influence based on the followers' perspectives, characteristics, and *inner motivators*. We review them in turn.

## The Hard Tactics

The hard influence approaches are requesting, legitimating, and building coalitions.

### REQUESTING

Requesting is probably the simplest influence approach. Requesting is when the leader uses simple demands to get others to take action. Requesting means gaining the commitment of the people you lead by making a direct statement of what you want and by asserting your position confidently and certainly. Requesting also includes the use of frequent checking and persistent reminders to get people to act. Requesting is the influence approach at the core of “command and control” leadership.

Requesting is in use when a company leader gives orders to a team of direct reports during a turnaround program, when a team leader asks a team member to get something done, or when a sergeant orders a squad of soldiers to attack an enemy's position.

Requesting—often referred to as “pressure tactics” in academic papers—is based on the principle of authority, meaning that people tend to obey authority figures, even if these authorities ask them to perform objectionable acts.<sup>7</sup> The famous Milgram experiments conducted by Yale University psychologist Stanley Milgram in the 1960s explored the principle of authority. These tests demonstrated that people are willing to obey authority figures who instruct them to perform activities that conflict with their personal conscience.<sup>8</sup>

Requesting or command and control tactics may have negative connotations; in fact, people often equate them with being threatened. However, requesting per se is not a negative approach. It is just the simplest way to make a demand in a nonthreatening way, leaving no room for negotiation, but also not suggesting punishment or other consequences.

Typical statements by a leader using requesting are:

- “I want you to inform Jack that. . . .”
- “Could you please call Frank and . . . ?”
- “I did ask you to inform him. Have you had a chance to do it?”

## LEGITIMATING

Legitimizing is slightly more complex than requesting in that a leader adds a legitimation or rationalization for the command and control approach. With legitimating the leader seeks to establish the legitimacy of a request or to state that he or she has the authority to make it.

Legitimizing means using authority or credentials to explain and influence, for instance, when leaders show that what they want is consistent with policy, procedure, or company culture. Leaders who refer to management directives, laws, rules, supportive corporate authorities, or recognized experts are legitimating.

Typical statements by a leader using legitimating tactics include:

- “According to policy, all air travel must be. . . .”
- “The CEO has asked me to look into. . . .”
- “As you know, it is a standard practice that. . . .”

## COALITION

Coalition is similar to legitimating; however, its standing doesn't come from references to any form of authority. Leaders using this approach enlist other people's help and use their support as a way to get the people they lead to do something.<sup>9</sup> The use of coalition tactics often indicates that leaders are getting others to help them extend influence or reach goals they could not accomplish on their own.

Coalition tactics include creating a network of supporters to extend the leader's power base, building consensus, defining a group position, or creating an "us-versus-them" situation. Leaders who cite the names of their supporters when they make a request are also using this tactic.

Typical statements by a leader using coalition tactics are:

- "Jack and I both think that. . ."
- "Everyone on the finance team says. . ."
- "As a team, we have decided that. . ."
- "Everybody thinks it is a good idea to. . ."

## The Soft Tactics

There are six soft approaches to influencing others: rational persuasion, socializing, exchanging, personal appeals, consultation, and inspirational appeals. On a rising scale, they increasingly focus on the people being influenced as the source of energy for carrying out the actions requested.

### RATIONAL PERSUASION

Rational persuasion is a simple tactic. It combines the request of the pressure approach with logical arguments supporting the request.

With the rational persuasion tactic, leaders use logical arguments and factual evidence to show that a request is feasible and relevant to reaching important objectives.<sup>10</sup> Rational persuasion uses logic, rationale, or evidence to explain or justify a position, and to show that the leader's perspective is the most logical alternative.

To make a case using rational persuasion, leaders rely on having the knowledge or expertise to present facts analytically or they provide charts, graphs, data, statistics, photographs, or other forms of proof.

Typical statements by a leader using rational persuasion tactics are:

- “The company’s transformation is necessary to achieve growth, to reduce costs, and to beat the competition.”
- “Given the data available, the most logical approach is. . . .”
- “I want you to take action. The facts suggest three reasons for moving ahead. . . .”

The logic in rational persuasion is the leader’s logic. While the leader adds supporting arguments, rational persuasion is still an approach to influence that—like hard tactics—is articulated top down from the leader’s perspective, and not from the ground up.

## SOCIALIZING

With socializing, leaders start to take an interest in those they are trying to lead. Socializing uses praise and flattery before or during an attempt to get others to carry out a request or support a proposal.<sup>11</sup> Socializing means establishing a basis for asking, behaving in a warm and cordial manner to influence others to act, being friendly, disclosing personal information, or building a relationship.

It includes building rapport by identifying commonalities, and matching behaviors or conversational pacing. Socializing is based on the principle of liking, which says people are more easily persuaded by those they like.<sup>12</sup>

Typical statements by a leader using socializing tactics are:

- “I am very impressed by what you have achieved. That really shows lots of commitment and dedication. It would be great if you could. . . .”
- “I see the problem exactly the same way. . . .”
- “I also have two kids. . . .”

Academic papers sometimes refer to socializing as “ingratiation.”

## PERSONAL APPEALS

Personal appeals are more focused on other people, as they assume some form of relationship and trust between a leader and those being influenced.

With personal appeals the leader asks others to carry out a request or support a proposal out of friendship, or asks for a personal favor before saying what it is.<sup>13</sup> Making a personal appeal means asking based on friendship, loyalty, trust, or a past relationship.

Leaders using personal appeals might tell staffers they are counting on their support.

Typical statements by a leader using personal appeals are:

- “You and I go back a long time in this company. I’d really like your help on. . . .”
- “I need to ask you for a favor. . . .”
- “Can I count on you guys making . . . ?”

## EXCHANGING

Exchanging is even more focused on others because it assumes that the leader understands what is valuable and important to the people being influenced.

With exchanging, leaders give something of value to the people being led in return for getting something they want. Exchanging is based on the concept of reciprocity, which says people tend to return a favor.<sup>14</sup> The leader offers others something they may want or offers to reciprocate at a later time if the others will do as requested.<sup>15</sup>

Negotiating, bargaining, or trading something, offering something with explicit or implicit expectations of receiving something in return, reciprocating, swapping favors or benefits, creating a win-win or a give-and-take situation, compromising, or making a concession in return for a concession are forms of exchange.

Typical statements by a leader using exchanging tactics are:

- “In return for participating in this employee survey, I will send you the aggregated results.”
- “If you support the decision, I will support your request. . . .”

## CONSULTATION

Consultation is even more focused on others, because the leader pulls them in and engages them in developing a course of action. With consultation, the leader asks others to suggest improvements or help plan a proposed activity or change that wants or requires their support.<sup>16</sup>

Participative leadership is a form of consultation. Consultation means asking others to help the leader arrive at an acceptable solution, appealing to others’ expertise, asking for input, probing for feedback, inviting others to participate or become involved in a process, incorporating others’ ideas, or acting on their suggestions to give them a sense of ownership.

Typical statements by a leader using consultation tactics are:

- “My suggestion is that we do XYZ. What would you suggest?”
- “In your opinion, what would be the advantages and disadvantages?”
- “Knowing the industry, do you see a merger as the best choice?”

- “As an expert in this area, do you think that . . . ?”

## INSPIRATIONAL APPEALS

Last come inspirational appeals, the core ingredient of inspirational leadership. They are by far the most personal in terms of understanding others' perspectives because they focus on what lies deep in other people's mind-sets: their values and emotions.

Leaders using this tactic appeal to people's values and ideals or seek to arouse their emotions to gain commitment for a request or proposal.<sup>17</sup>

A leader using inspirational appeals might say:

- “Because you care for the development of children, I'd like you to take on the elementary education project.”
- “You're the best one to handle this negotiation because you care about being both businesslike and environmentally sensitive.”

We discuss the process of inspirational appeals in detail in Chapter 6.

## The Frequency of Use of Individual Influencing Approaches

Which of the nine influencing approaches do people use most?

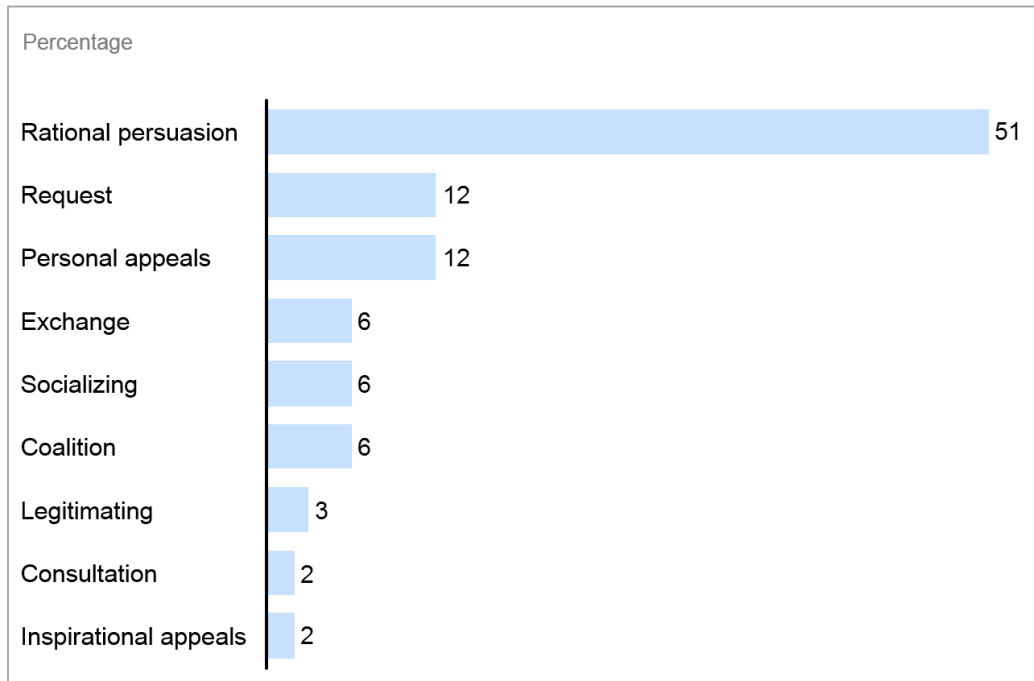
Several studies suggest that rational persuasion is the most frequently used influencing approach. For instance, in the early 1990s, Yukl and Falbe analyzed the frequency of influencing approaches by gathering 504 influence-related incidents from 95 evening MBA students at a large state university. The students worked in regular jobs during the day at a variety of large and small private companies and public agencies.

Nearly half the students were managers, and most of the rest were nonmanagerial professionals. All incidents were reported from the perspective of the target of an influencing attempt made by a subordinate, peer, or boss.<sup>18</sup>

According to their study, these cases used rational persuasion more than half of the time, followed by simple requesting and personal appeals (each 12 percent of the time). Inspirational appeals and consultation came last; each of them was used only 2 percent of the time (Figure 3.2).

**Figure 3.2 Frequency of Influence Tactics**





Source: C. M. Falbe and G. Yukl, "Consequences for Managers of Using Single Influence Tactics and Combinations of Tactics," *Academy of Management Journal* 35, no. 3 (1992): 638–652.

But which approach is the most effective?

## What Tactics Work When

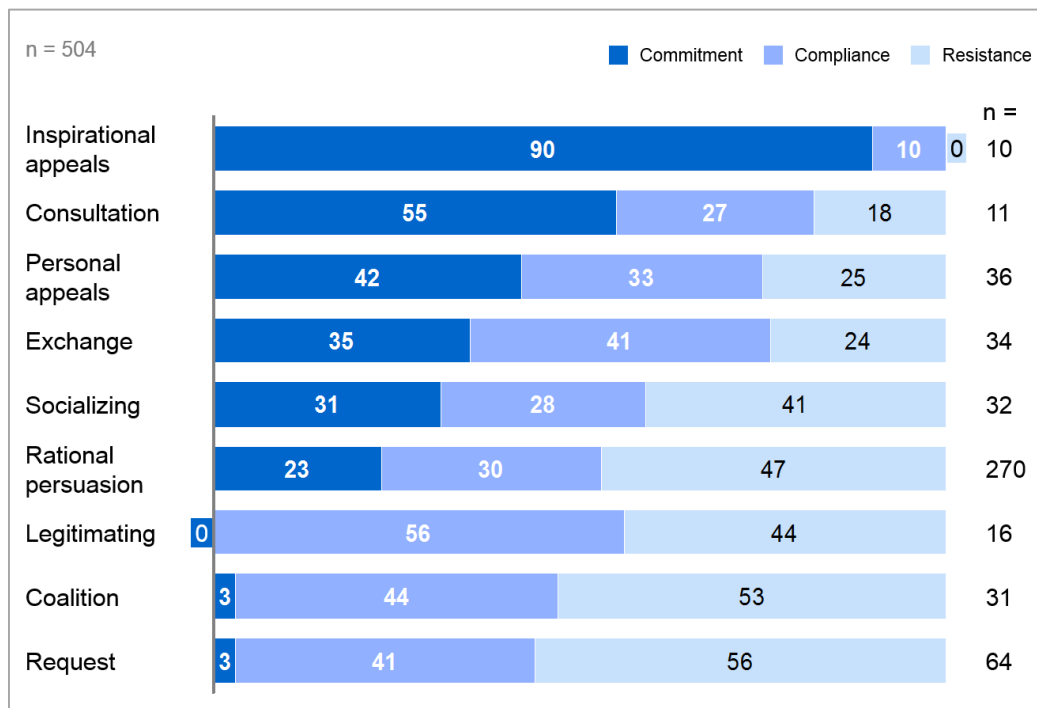
You can assess the effectiveness of influencing approaches by distinguishing among the three different outcomes of influence: the commitment, compliance, or resistance of those addressed.<sup>19</sup>

- As discussed earlier, *commitment* is when the person targeted by an influence approach agrees internally with an action or a decision. The person is enthusiastic about it and is likely to exercise initiative and demonstrate unusual effort and persistence in order to carry out the request successfully, even when faced with resistance or setbacks.
- *Compliance* is when the targeted person carries out the requested action, but is apathetic about it, rather than enthusiastic. This person makes only a minimal or average effort, does not show any initiative, and is likely to give up if confronted with resistance or setbacks.

- *Resistance* is when the person targeted opposes the requested action and tries to avoid doing it by refusing, arguing, delaying, or seeking to have the request nullified.

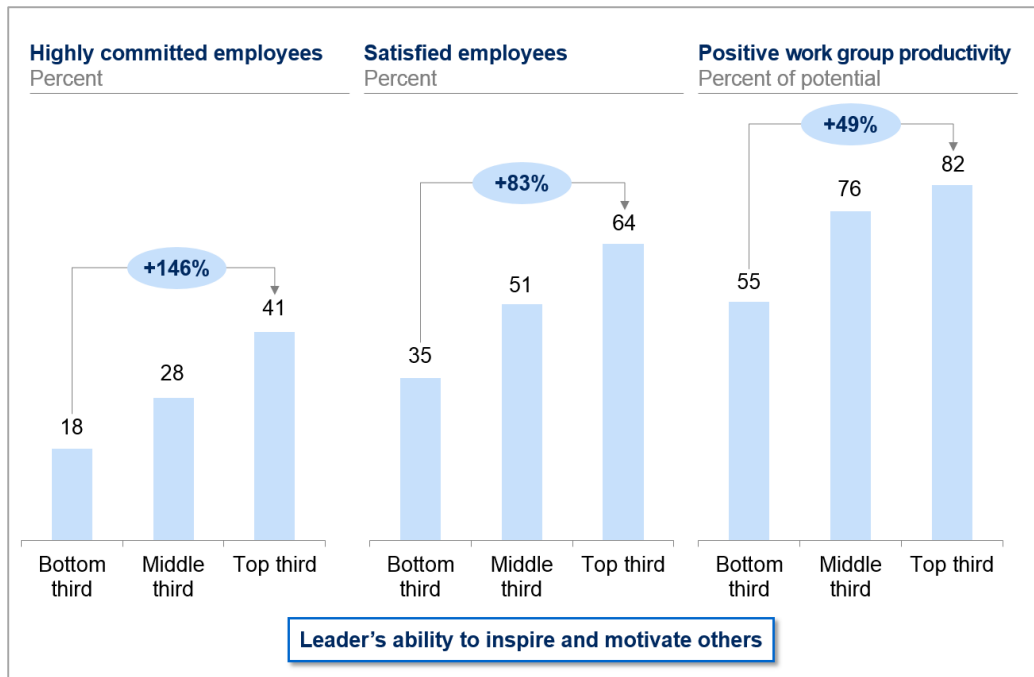
Figure 3.3 shows the results of a study performed by Yukl and Falbe.<sup>20</sup>

**Figure 3.3 Outcome of Influencing Tactics**



Source: C. M. Falbe and G. Yukl, "Consequences for Managers of Using Single Influence Tactics and Combinations of Tactics," *Academy of Management Journal* 35, no. 3 (1992): 638–652. This study finds that inspirational appeals are the most effective tactics in getting people to commit to actions.

A recent four-year study involving more than 200,000 respondents by Zenger, Folkman, and Edinger, three leadership consultants, confirms these findings.<sup>21</sup> The three authors found that when leaders behave in a truly inspirational manner, their employees are more committed, more satisfied, and more productive than those who follow less inspiring leaders. Specifically, they found that inspirational leaders (defined as leaders with a top one-third score on "ability to inspire and motivate others") have 2.4 times more highly committed followers than noninspirational leaders (defined as leaders with a bottom one-third score on "ability to inspire and motivate others"). Inspirational leaders have also 83 percent more satisfied followers and 49 percent more productive followers than noninspirational leaders (Figure 3.4).

**Figure 3.4 Inspirational Leaders Have More Committed, Satisfied, and Productive Followers**

Source: J. H. Zenger, J. R. Folkman, and S. K. Edinger, *The Inspiring Leader* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2009).

These studies suggest that hard leadership approaches—requesting (command and control), coalition, or legitimating—tend to create no commitment to action and change, or only very little. However, they create a high level of compliance. They lead to others carrying out the requested actions with little enthusiasm, but still carrying them out. Unlike soft influence approaches that require facts and figures (rational persuasion) or necessitate gaining others' understanding, hard approaches are simple and straightforward. For requests that are easy and routine, like performing a straightforward, short task, and for times when compliance may be the only thing needed to accomplish a leader's objective, hard influencing approaches are effective and efficient in terms of cost and time.

Thus it appears that the correct leadership approach, that is, the right choice of influence tactic, depends on the situation.<sup>22</sup> In a number of situations, hard influence approaches may be more effective and efficient than soft tactics, for example:

- *Static situations*—These are situations of limited change, when the required tasks are routine or standard procedures; hard influence approaches and, in particular, *legitimizing* may be the most efficient tactic.

- *Simple, clear tasks*—When there is little ambiguity about a simple task, a straightforward requesting approach is very effective and efficient.
- *Urgency*—When there is time pressure and actions have to happen swiftly, *requesting* and *legitimizing* approaches may again be superior to soft approaches that tend to take more time to unfold.
- *Leader's relevant knowledge*—When the leader knows exactly what needs to be done, either because of knowledge or previous experience, *requesting* approaches may work best. For example, a leader who is spearheading a company turnaround, and who has a good understanding of the industry and the organization, and knows exactly what needs to be done (and has, for example, led a similar turnaround before) may want to use *requesting*, i.e., command and control approaches.

Compared to hard influence approaches, soft ones are more effective for gaining commitment. But they are less efficient. That means they take more time and effort. Rational persuasion requires arguments and facts, which may not be readily available. *Socializing* and *personal appeal* require trust, which may take time to build. And, *exchanging*, *consultation*, and *inspirational* appeals require an understanding of the people the leader is targeting. A leader needs time to think through a situation and put him- or herself in someone else's shoes.

The leader may need to answer several questions in order to decide to deploy *exchanging*, *consultation*, or *inspirational* appeals: what situational context faces the other people involved? What are they trying to achieve? What background, knowledge, and experiences do they bring to the situation? What do they value? What type of emotions may they be experiencing? Answering these questions takes time and skill.

Furthermore, some of the soft approaches may be hard to apply at scale. You can ask one person or a group of people for a favor, but asking an entire company may not be feasible. The same is true for *socializing* and *exchanging*. *Consultation* is also time-consuming and hard to scale. It works only when the leader can empower the right employee representatives to agree on a set of actions, and they have the followership to ensure that employees implement those actions.

However, soft tactics are the most effective in these situations:

- *Dynamic environment*—When decisions need to be taken across the organization, not just by a handful of leaders, soft approaches work well since they create widespread commitment and energy in the organization.
- *Complexity*—Soft approaches are more effective for complex tasks, which require extra effort, initiative, and persistence to carry out effectively.
- *Ambiguity*—In situations of ambiguity, when it isn't totally clear to the leader what actions may be needed for success, soft approaches empower people to make

decisions at lower levels of the organization, where the necessary information and facts supporting a decision may be available.

\* \* \*

Inspirational leadership builds on inspirational appeals. It is probably the most powerful form of leadership, and may well be the only soft approach that is scalable and that allows firms to thrive in situations characterized by ambiguity, complexity, and rapid change.

But why is it so powerful?

The answer may lie in the nature of our brain.

# Notes

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