Situational Context: A Core Leadership Dimension

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It is important for leaders to know what is going on around them. Understanding and managing situations is a core dimension of leadership and a key area of accountability for leaders. After reviewing some relevant literature, a practice oriented framework is offered which focuses on four spheres of influence and is operationalized through a management cycle. A review of the application value, implications and challenges of this approach is provided. With increasing accountability for organizational outcomes, such as stakeholder well-being and ethical conduct, this approach gives practitioners a way to understand and manage the dynamics associated with situational context.

INTRODUCTION

Leaders at all levels in an organization are confronted with situations requiring understanding and management. [1] The context surrounding these situations represent elements which, when effectively recognized and assessed, can help strengthen decision making. Leaders who have the ability to effectively understand "what is going on" in a given situation increase their chances of making better informed decisions and likely improve their overall effectiveness. This ability also helps leaders see and comprehend factors that impact stakeholder well-being which is an increasingly important area of accountability for organizational leaders (Wood & Winston (2005); Robertson & Flint-Taylor, 2009; Harquail & Brickson, 2012).

Unfortunately, there is a dearth of practice oriented frameworks and tools to help leaders better understand and manage the dynamics associated with situational context. Klimoski (2013) points out that the manner in which features of situational context have been conceptualized is frequently based on author preferences, leaving the field of leadership without a coherent framework. Situational context has also received little empirical research as it relates to managerial leadership (Dierdorff, Rubin & Morgeson, 2009; Schruijer & Vansino, 2002) and organizational behavior (Johns, 2006). Endsley (2004) does, however, offer a theoretical model of situation awareness that can be extrapolated to the practice of managerial leadership.

In endeavoring to better understand and manage situational context, a three stage model of situational awareness can be useful (Endsley, 2004; 1995). The first stage in realizing situational awareness is perceiving the key factors that are potentially operating in the environment. The next stage relates to synthesizing and comprehending the factors perceived as relevant in stage one. The third stage involves projecting the future impacts the factors may have in the environment. Taken together, situational awareness is enhanced by recognizing factors in the environment and understanding what they mean and how this perceived context will impact future conditions in the operating environment (Endsley, 1997,

2004). Dervitsiotis (2007) provides a model that includes sensing, interpreting and deciding when one is confronted by changing situational circumstances. In addition, we can be mindful that sensemaking typically involves scanning, interpreting and responding and that differences in cognitive content and structure influence these three sensemaking elements (Hahn, Preuss, Pinkse & Figge, 2014; Daft & Weick, 1984).

This article offers a practice oriented framework for understanding and managing situational context. The framework is supported by a management cycle which help leaders apply the model. The framework's and cycle's application value, implications and some challenges in managing situation context are presented. The framework is embedded within a comprehensive system of managerial leadership which has been studied and practiced by the author and colleagues over three decades with the intent of helping clients achieve desired results. The current article will focus on the dimension of situational context within this broader system.

SITUATIONAL CONTEXT AND LEADERSHIP

Situational context and leadership have been conceptualized and studied over many years with some attention being given to the interplay between these two topics (Osborn, Uhl-Bien & Milosevic, 2014; Liden & Antonakis, 2009; Pettigrew, 1987). The study of the interaction of situations, people and behavior has been part of this journey. In terms of organizational leadership, the leader's behavior can both influence and be influenced by the situation. From a practitioner's perspective, it would be useful to have a practical framework from which to view situations to help managerial leaders proactively act and/or react to situational contexts.

When seeking to offer practitioners practice oriented frameworks and tools to enhance their effectiveness, both experience learned in field studies and from other forms of research can be of assistance. The work to bridge theory and research with practice is critical to help reduce the base rate of managerial leadership incompetence and/or ineffectiveness. Alarmingly, studies indicate that ineffective managerial leadership exceeds 50% across organizational settings yet annual spending on formal training and development for leaders is about fourteen billion dollars (Hogan, Hogan, & Kaiser, 2011; Gentry & Chappelow, 2009; Kaiser & Curphy, 2013). It is the author's position that managerial leader effectiveness can be enhanced by offering practitioners practice oriented frameworks and tools that are based on evidence gleaned from practice and/or research. The current article offers a framework and management cycle to help managerial leaders better understand and manage situational context. The accountable leader can better serve and likely more effectively manage problems, challenges, and opportunities when they know what is going on both inside and outside of their organization.

A number of streams of research have contributed to our knowledge and understanding of the dynamic interplay between situational context and leadership behavior. For example, studies by Vroom and Jago (2007) concerning the role of situations in leadership conclude that three roles are played by situational context in leadership. First, they found that organizational effectiveness is impacted by situational variables not under the influence of a leader. Factors such as government legislation, technological innovations and the economy can influence organizational outcomes. Second, situations can influence how managerial leaders act. Leadership behavior is impacted by situational context outside themselves and by their own pool of personal resources such as personality and behavioral preferences that they bring to situations. Third, the outcomes of leader decisions and subsequent actions are affected by situational context. It would be prudent for leaders to proactively look at key situational elements confronting them before taking action. Interestingly, as Vroom and Jago (2007) point out, many popular resources on managerial leadership contain prescriptions for action without giving any consideration to situational context.

The field of leadership has likely associated extensively with the study of individual differences perhaps at the expense of more closely examining how situational context can influence leader behavior. The search for a general trait of leadership that is robust across all situations has been countered by the work of recent investigations (Judge, Simon, Hurst, & Kelley, 2014; Fleeson, 2011; Larsson & Vinberg,

2010; Fleeson, 2007; Leikas, Lonnqviors, & Verkasalo, 2012). It seems that the interplay between leaders and situations is more variable than static. In fact, investigations have shown that situational conditions can account for considerable response variability beyond the influence of individual differences which adds support to the role situational context plays in impacting leader actions (Vroom, 2000; Vroom & Jago, 1988; Vroom & Jago, 2007).

Lewin's (1951; Lewin & Gold, 1999) observation, that the behavior of an individual is a function of the person and the situation, connects to the topic of situational context and leadership. He made a distinction between concrete external elements and the perceptions that a person has of concrete external factors. It seems that we need to account for both the actual as well as the perceived nature of context in one's environment (Magnusson, 1981). In terms of understanding managerial leadership behavior in a specific situational context, we need to understand both the various external influences facing the leader as well as the leader's perceptions of these elements (Funder. 2006; Sherman, Nave, & Funder, 2012).

While it is beyond the scope of this article to provide a comprehensive review of the literature on situational context and leadership, several additional works are noteworthy. For example, expanding our recognition of the forces that influence the behavior of leaders in situations beyond the internal organizational environment has been suggested by Osborn, Hunter, and Jauch (2002). These authors put forth a contextual theory of leadership that highlights the dynamic business forces that can powerfully impact organizations. These macro type forces produce a context of complexity and uncertainty which challenge a leader's sensemaking skills. These forces can influence what leaders pay attention to, who they network with and how they collect information on specific issues. Situational context from this perspective is seen in a broader business environment which extends beyond an organization's internal operating environment.

In contrast, like most researchers studying situational context and leadership, Porter and McLaughlin (2006) looked at the conceptual and empirical work done regarding situational context within an organization. They found that over a 15-year period factors such as structure, culture, people and business processes were the focus of study. Johns (2006) also provided a framework for thinking about an organization's internal environment. He conceptualized the environment into task, social and physical factors, and studied the topic of situational strength and leader discretion.

In practice, a managerial leader's effectiveness can be enhanced by looking at a variety of contextual influences that are internal as well as external to an organization's operating environment. These situations vary depending on the amount of discretion a leader has to effect change (John, 2006; Meyer, Dalal, & Hermida. 2010). The interplay between managerial leader roles and situational context has been shown to be significant (Dierdorff, Rubin, & Morgeson, 2009).

Based in a review of the literature and decades of study and practice, the author strongly supports the notion that effective leadership and situational context are closely connected. It is unfortunate that there is a paucity of literature on the topic of leadership and situational context and even less on practice oriented frameworks and tools to help organizational leaders serve key stakeholders. The current article is intended to offer a framework and management cycle for managerial leaders to use to better understand and manage situational context.
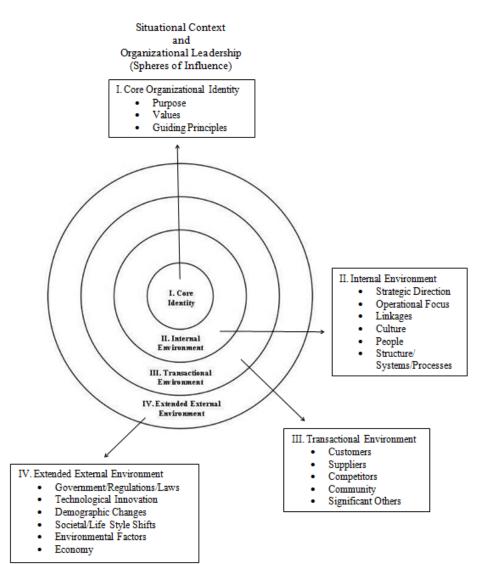
PRACTICE ORIENTED FRAMEWORK

A practice oriented framework that addresses situational context may likely enhance organizational leaders' effectiveness. In developing frameworks and tools to enhance leadership excellence and organizational effectiveness, such as the one offered in this article, the author and his colleagues utilize the following set of criteria (Kerns, 2014). The framework and tools need to:

- Add value to an organization
- Have face validity for practitioners
- Be relevant to practitioners' daily work
- Be evidence based in practice and/or research

- Be practical to implement in an organizational operating environment
- Be coachable/teachable

With the above criteria as guideposts, the author has developed, a situational context framework which focuses on four major spheres of influence affecting leaders, as shown in Figure 1. This spheres of influence framework has been applied in many settings including work organizations, executive education classrooms, and applied research projects. The model is practitioner friendly and draws from and is conceptually tied to the relevant literature (including the work previously noted) relating to the study of situational context and leadership.

The framework depicted in Figure 1 includes four spheres of influence: core organizational identity, internal environment, transactional environment and extended external environment. Each of the four spheres of influence are briefly reviewed below.

FIGURE 1
PRACTICE-ORIENTED SITUATIONAL CONTEXT FRAMEWORK

Situational Context
and
Organizational Leadership
(Spheres of Influence)

I. Core Organizational Identity
- Purpose
- Values
- Guiding Principles

I. Core Identity

II. Internal Environment

III. Transactional Environment

IV. Extended External Environment

II. Internal Environment
- Strategic Direction
- Operational Focus
- Linkages
- Culture
- People
- Structure/ Systems/Processes

III. Transactional Environment
- Customers
- Suppliers
- Competitors
- Community
- Significant Others

IV. Extended External Environment
- Government/Regulations/Laws
- Technological Innovation
- Demographic Changes
- Societal/Life Style Shifts
- Environmental Factors
- Economy

Core Organizational Identity

An organization's core identity offers an understanding of the attributes that define the organization and set it apart from other entities, serving to answer the question, "who are we as an organization" (Harquail & Brickson, 2012). It is important that the nature of an organization's core identity such as its purpose, values, and guiding principles be aligned with the individual leader's core identity and the other three spheres of influence (Dervitsiotis, 2012). This sphere of influence provides a filter through which leadership and stakeholders may view the internal operating environment, look at transactions with others outside of the organization and perceive the influence from more distant (extended external environment) elements. An organization's core identity has the most impact on the other spheres of influence when it is clear and embraced by key stakeholders especially in the internal environment sphere of influence. [2]

Internal Environment

The internal environment relates to the organization's strategic direction, operational focus and linkages with resources. The organizational culture, people and structure, as well as systems and processes are also contained within this sphere of influence. Managerial leaders need to discern what is going on regarding these elements within the internal organizational environment and how they may be individually and/or collectively influencing a specific situation.

Transactional Environment

Transactional environmental influences derive from interactions occurring on a periodic basis. Organizational stakeholders who do business with an organization and/or are regularly impacted by the enterprise are found in this sphere of influence, as are customers, suppliers and competitors. Two often overlooked elements within this sphere of influence are local and/or regional communities in which the enterprise is located and significant others such as family, extended family and others connected to an organization's workforce.

Extended External Environment

The extended external environment sphere contains important influences which are beyond the control of managerial leaders. These influences include such areas as government legislation, demographic changes and the economy. Other macro level factors may include technology, societal life style preferences and environmental considerations. This sphere of influence has more impact on leaders in some industry sectors than in others.

These four spheres of influence likely impact managerial leaders differently depending upon a leader's hierarchical level within an organization. Peus, Braun and Frey (2013) as well as De Church, Hiller, Murase, Doty and Salas (2010) emphasize the importance of a leader's impact across organizational levels. In terms of situational context, Osborn and Marion (2009), for example, show how the number and nature of alliances vary as a function of the leader and strategic context. While the four spheres of influence offered in the current framework seem to indeed interact differently with leadership levels, they have been shown to be relevant and important to managerial leaders across levels.

Situational context can be challenging for leaders to understand and manage. In an effort to determine factors within various spheres of situational influence and the impact the management of these elements may have in particular situations, the author and his colleagues have been asking five key questions to practicing leaders: [3]

- Frequency of use – How frequently do you look at situations facing you as a leader within these four spheres of influence?
- Effectiveness – How is your effectiveness as a leader impacted by how frequently you understand and manage contextual factors within the four spheres of influence?
- Importance – How important are contextual influences within the four spheres of influence to your success as a leader?

- Relevance – Are influences within these spheres of influence relevant to success in your leadership role?
- Challenge – How challenging is it for you to manage influence within each of the four spheres of influence?

Significant opportunities exist for practitioners, researchers and teachers to draw upon known and evolving knowledge about managerial leaders' understanding and management of situational context. The framework offered here extends this knowledge by building upon observations and experience gathered by the author in working with a broad range of managerial leaders across industries. Based on fieldwork, applied research and consulting that addresses the areas of questioning noted earlier combined with reviews of relevant literature, the author has made the following observations about situational context: [4]

1. Managerial leaders appear to find situational context to be a relevant and important topic.
2. It is unclear whether any one of the four spheres of influence is more challenging to manage than the others.
3. It seems likely that managerial leaders, especially C-level executives, are impacted by all four spheres of influence.
4. The attention paid to each of the four spheres of influence seems to vary within and between managerial leaders. (This observation is aligned with the previously noted research literature relating to leadership and individual differences (Judge, Simon, Hurst, & Kelley, 2014; Fleeson, 2011; Fleeson & Gallagher, 2009)).
5. The challenge for managerial leaders in terms of managing situational context is in focusing on the most important and actionable spheres of influence.
6. Managerial leaders who focus predominately on external environments may likely neglect internal operational issues impacting their organizations. Conversely, paying too much attention to internal environmental factors may undermine setting a clear and motivating strategic direction (Kerns & Ko, 2014).
7. A leader's behavior appears to interact with the strength of situations the leader encounters (Myer & Dalal, 2009). Situations allowing for significant discretion seem to be more conducive to expressing a leader's authentic/true self. (This observation is aligned with the recent research on situational context offered by Kanfer (2012), Dalal & Hulin (2008) and Johns (2006) relating to motivation. Sources of an individual leader's motivation seem to interact with situational context in dynamic ways Kerns, (2014).)

Based on the above observations and studying the topic of situational context and leadership, a set of practices has emerged that can help a managerial leader better understand and manage situational context. These practices include recognizing, and assessing contextual factors and formulating behavioral options to address situational problems, challenges and opportunities and together they form the basis of a situational context management cycle offered in Figure 2.

Practitioners are in need of frameworks and tools that conform to a set of useful criteria (such as those previously noted) to help them improve their effectiveness. To this end, the author uses the framework depicted in Figure 2 in his consulting, teaching and applied research relating to a managerial leader's understanding and management of situational context. The four spheres depicted in Figure 1 provide a set of factors to guide a leader's attention in identifying problems, challenges and opportunities. The individual leader, in turn, based on his/her recognition of the situational cues, assesses people and situations within and across these spheres. These assessments and perceptions influence behavioral options and the actions that are taken, ranging from personal change initiatives to organizational change efforts. Ultimately a leader's unique perceptions and assessments of these spheres of influence and factors within, along with input from others, lead to the formulation of behavioral options and contribute to outcomes. Outcomes can be measured in terms of organizational, individual and career effectiveness. (In

the author's work, these three outcomes have not necessarily correlated. For example, a highly ambitious achievement oriented leader may rapidly advance his/her career by linking with spheres of influence outside the leader's current organization while internal organizational and individual effectiveness may suffer (Kerns, 2014).

FIGURE 2
SITUATIONAL CONTEXT MANAGEMENT CYCLE

Identifying	➜	Recognizing	➜	Assessing	➜	Formulating	➜	Projecting
The Correct: • Problem • Challenge • Opportunity		Spheres of influence at play: • Core Identity • Internal • Transactional • Extended External		Impacts and Dynamic Interplay of Spheres of Influence and Specific Influences		Action Plans and Behavioral Options		Potential Outcomes: • Organizational • Individual • Career

A key potential opportunity for leader growth and development is depicted by the dotted line in Figure 2 running from outcomes to formulating action plans, to identifying problems, challenges and opportunities, etc. With the help of an executive coach or mentor, or through personal reflection, a leader may enhance his/her skills in understanding and managing within and across spheres of influence. The author has seen this feedback loop help change leaders' focus and skill level in executing the practices associated with the situational context management cycle. There may also be an interaction between organizational level and what the individual leader attends to, especially as it relates to internal and external spheres of influence.

Conceptually sound yet practical frameworks and tools can help practitioners better understand and optimally manage situational context. Asking the right questions with the guidance from a practice oriented framework and management approach can help leadership practitioners gain greater awareness and perspective with respect to situations they face. In turn, researchers as well as teachers of leadership can benefit from the development and sharing of practice oriented frameworks and tools like the ones offered here. Helping managerial leaders become more effective in practicing in this key practice area of leadership is a core dimension of an integrated framework driving managerial leadership effectiveness.

APPLICATION VALUE AND IMPLICATIONS

Work relating to situational context has application value and implications for practitioners, researchers and teachers. All three groups are contributors to helping emerging leaders and/or practicing leaders grow and develop. Practitioners especially can benefit from having practical frameworks and tools to help them better understand and manage situational context. A discussion of the application value and implications of the current work across practice, research, and teaching domains follows.

Practice Domain

Using the situational context framework and management cycle described above as a reference point may help further facilitate discussion on ways to help managerial leaders better understand and manage problems, challenges and opportunities. This framework and management cycle has served as a practical springboard for productive conversations relating to recognizing, assessing and formulating behavioral options in dealing with the four spheres of influence both individually and collectively. From these conversations, interesting patterns have emerged about individual leader's preferences relating to the amount of time and time perspective they apply to each of the four spheres of influence (Kerns, 2012).

An especially helpful way to apply the framework has been to present the four sources of influence to executives when they are looking for cues to help solve a pressing problem. In this approach a leader is asked to distribute a 100 points across the four spheres of influence in proportion to relative weight or relevance to a particular situation as a way to express proportionally. This application typically helps the leader recognize which sphere and associated elements are most connected to addressing the problem. It has also proven helpful in identifying spheres of influence where an executive may lack understanding and experience in recognizing relevant and important situational cues. This framework and management cycle may be utilized to facilitate self-reflection on and assessment of a leader's effectiveness at recognizing, assessing and formulating behavioral options to deal with situations confronting them. Self-reflection and assessment can be advanced by using the five questions offered above.

The five questions listed above have also been used with organizational teams to help them better understand and manage situational contexts surrounding problems, challenges and opportunities. This process seems to help teams become more confident and competent at recognizing, assessing, and formulating action plans to address significant issues. During this process teams have been observed to increase their alignment and engagement with their organization's core identity. On numerous occasions the process of reviewing the five questions in relationship to an organization's core identity sphere of influence appears to have increased organizational commitment among individuals and within groups.

The framework offered here has also proven to be useful in helping to select individuals for various leadership positions. Specifically, in the context of a selection interviewing process, candidates have been asked a variety of situational judgment questions. After being presented with a problem, the candidate is given a graphic displaying the four spheres of influence and asked to consider which spheres may be most relevant and important. Candidates are assessed on their abilities to recognize cues, assess relationship among the spheres, formulate behavioral options and project potential outcomes. This application of the framework and the management cycle has proven to be very revealing of a candidate's skill at understanding what is going on in situations that they will likely face if ultimately hired.

The above situational judgment application has also been useful in the context of leader development. In these circumstances a leader is asked to practice applying the situational context framework and management cycle to impending challenges and opportunities. This activity has proven to be a valuable source of feedback to a leader especially when connections are made between the situational judgments and an individual leader's effectiveness.

Research Domain

While this article is focused on practicing managerial leaders with the hope of helping them better understand and manage situational context, several areas seem to be ripe for additional research. It would be of interest to further investigate the relationship between the four spheres of influence and a leader's efficacy in applying the framework and management cycle. Also, more rigorously evaluating the five questions presented earlier would help shed light on the frequency, effectiveness, importance, relevance, and challenge level that each of the four spheres of influence pose for managerial leaders. The author and his colleagues are currently collecting data from C-level executives to shed light on this area. In addition, a more detailed analysis and indexing of the specific managerial leadership behaviors associated with each of the components in the situational context framework and management cycle would be instructive. It is likely that each of the behavioral components in the framework and cycle present different challenges for leaders depending upon their personal resource profile.

Investigating the multi-level alignment and engagement of leaders' understanding and management of situational context across an organization's structure would be useful (Drath, McCauley, Palus, Vestor, O'Connor, & McGuire, 2008). A better understanding of the dynamics within and among organizational levels as they relate to managing key situations would be helpful. This work would help support research efforts to further examine topics such as situational context and leadership across multiple organizational levels (De Chruch, Hiller, Murase, Doty & Salas, 2010; Mathieu & Chen, 2011).

Empirical evaluation of the impacts of situational context on managerial leader effectiveness, career success and organizational effectiveness would also be important. The practice oriented framework and management cycle offered here could be strengthened by empirical examination and exploration to identify additional elements associated with each of the components in this situational context model. Consideration should also be given to reviewing additional spheres of influence beyond those offered in the current framework.

The work to develop interactionist approaches to measuring situation context like situational judgment tests needs to continue (Campion & Ployhart, 2013; Motowidlo & Beir, 2010; Lievens, Peeters, & Schollaert, 2008). This research area offers an opportunity for practitioners and applied researchers to come together to design, develop and test real-world oriented assessments to measure aspiring and/or seasoned leaders' situational judgment. It also holds promise for the development of assessments that can be used in educational settings as part of experiential exercises facilitated by teachers and other developers of leaders.

Finally, the emerging research on authenticity at work connects well with the framework offered here. It would be useful, for example, to know how a leader's authenticity fluctuates in relationship to situational contexts. More specifically research that investigates the congruence between a leader's core identity (true self) and an organization's core identity, and how this relationship impacts a leader's well-being and performance, would be valuable. (Van Den Bosch & Taris, 2013; Toor & Ofori, 2009; Van Den Bosch & Taris, 2014).

Teaching Domain

The teaching of leadership could benefit from having practical frameworks and tools to offer emerging leaders as well as experienced leaders looking to enhance their effectiveness. The author has imported some of the applications used in organizational settings into the MBA classroom when teaching frameworks and tools associated with better understanding and managing situational context.

Experiential exercises, in particular, have been used by the author to help business students better understand and apply the situational context framework offered in this article. This process often includes presenting learners with real-world problems and having them work to make sense of the situation using the four spheres of influence and the management cycle as resources. They are asked to do this work in small groups to identify the spheres of influence at play, to assess dynamic interactions among the spheres, and to formulate behavioral action plans. Each group also typically projects the outcomes of their anticipated actions. These sessions conclude by having students identify and discuss the value to a managerial leader in knowing "what is going on" around them.

Another very powerful exercise for getting students to better understand and apply situational context to leadership is to have them develop a brief situational judgment test. In small groups, students are asked to identify three challenging problem situations that they have faced. The small group picks its top three situations and formulates a "what would you do" question for each situation. In turn, each small group gets to ask a member of another group these questions while the remaining students observe the interaction. Then the entire class is facilitated by the teacher in a discussion of how the student performed in responding to the situations presented. This exercise reinforces the importance of being able to manage situations and provides students with realistic exercises in striving to assess this skill in others. Situations that students are asked to generate in their small groups are usually posed as problems, challenges or opportunities.

One of the most impactful ways to bring the framework and management cycle alive for students is to have successful executives present the model to learners and show how they use it to better understand

and manage situational context. Students have responded favorably to these experiences especially when experienced executives disclose how they have improved their ability to better understand what is going on by systematically applying the framework and cycle to real-world situations. Having executives share their experiences in applying the practice oriented situational context framework and management cycle underscores the power of positive performance role modeling as a leadership teaching tool (Bandura, 1986).

SOME CHALLENGES

Operationalizing situational context in a way that helps managerial leaders better understand and manage problems, dilemmas and opportunities presents a variety of challenges. Practical and appropriate assessment tools are needed for managerial leaders to determine their effectiveness at recognizing key situational cues and integrating this information into coherent action plans. The work being done in developing Situational Judgment Tests will likely help provide relevant and useful instruments to help assess situational contexts (Bledow & Frese, 2009). This work and other developments can contribute to practitioners, teachers and applied researchers being more effective in their efforts to assess situational contexts. This work may help to positively impact a number of talent management topics such as selection, training and development of managerial leaders.

It will be challenging for managerial leaders to create and sustain alignment as well as engagement while managing strategic situations across organizational levels. This will require achieving agreement among key stakeholders in identifying problems and mutually deciding on which spheres of influence to target for assessment and action planning in specific situations. Managerial leaders will need to demonstrate competence in interpersonal influence skills to successfully enhance alignment and engagement in their organizations (Kerns, 2014). This challenge extends especially to global organizational leaders who must align and engage their organizations across diverse cultural boundaries (House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta, 2004).

Another challenge is to more fully understand the characteristics of individuals who effectively recognize, assess and formulate behavioral options when dealing with different situational contexts. The work being done to identify and assess individual differences among managerial leaders needs to be extended to include variables that may help predict who is best at understanding and managing situational dynamics (White & Shullman, 2010). This information would likely benefit those making selection decisions and aid others who are charged with investing in managerial leadership development programs. Meeting this challenge would also directly benefit practitioners by helping them, for example, target developmental need and performance improvement areas contained in the situational context framework and management cycle.

Finding ways to translate the theoretical formulations and academic oriented conversations around the concept of situational context for practitioners is also a challenge. In addition to offering managerial leaders frameworks and tools that are based on evidence gleaned from professional experience, field study, and applied research, we need to ensure that practitioner friendly language is used when describing approaches related to helping leaders better understand and manage situational context. The integration of spheres of influence into a practice oriented situational context framework and management cycle as offered here should help address this challenge.

Helping managerial leaders apply a balanced time perspective when assessing each of the four spheres of influence is another challenge. Kerns (2012) offers a time perspective framework that may be useful and helpful to managerial leaders as they strive to better understand and manage situational contexts. Looking at the four spheres of influence with a balanced time perspective of the past, present and future would seem to be important and impactful in reaching a more complete understanding of a specific situational context. Exploratory work in this area seems promising and the author is hopeful that these efforts will continue to offer useful information for managerial leaders and their advisors to use in helping leaders to effectively assess and manage situational context.

Attending to the challenges of assessment, alignment-engagement, individual differences, and managing time perspectives will enhance our understanding and management of situational context as a core leadership dimension. As more attention is focused on the practice oriented aspects of situational context, additional challenges for practitioners, applied researchers and teachers will be offered. This core dimension of leadership is an important and stimulating area of study which may likely contribute to enhancing leadership and organizational effectiveness across a variety of settings.

SUMMARY STATEMENT

The development and application of frameworks and tools to help managerial leaders more effectively understand and manage situational contexts will be beneficial to advancing the practice and study of leadership. With a systematic approach that builds upon practice oriented frameworks and tools, additional resources can be developed and applied to help leaders better understand and manage challenging situations at work. As this work moves forward there will be a need for assessment tools, additional practice oriented frameworks and the identification of best practices to help managerial leaders do their best when striving to answer the question concerning "what is going on" around them. These and related efforts will likely advance our knowledge and understanding of the dynamics associated with situational context in real work settings. As we progress, key areas of leader accountability like organizational well-being and ethics may be enhanced.

ENDNOTES

1. A debate comparing and contrasting management and leadership has occurred over more than thirty years. In this article the terms managerial leadership, management and leadership are used synonymously.
2. While it is beyond the scope of the current article, there is interesting work being done in the emerging field of Positive Organizational Scholarship on the role organizational identity may play in enhancing stakeholder well-being in organizational settings (Harquail & Brickson, 2012). Also, the concept of authenticity applied to leadership is of growing interest to researchers and practitioners. The degree of alignment between a leader's "true self", or core identity, and an organization's core identity likely impacts a leader's level of authenticity at work (Van Den Bosch & Taris, 2013; Toor & Ofori, 2009; Van Den Bosch & Taris, 2014).
3. This system of managerial leadership strives to provide practitioners, applied researchers and teachers with an integrated approach to viewing and understanding leadership. The system beings together several streams of leadership study and research that have been offered over the past 100 years. A core dimension in this model relates to a leader's understanding and management of situational context. As part of this dimension a better understanding and management of situational context can help advance the practice, study and teaching of leadership which is the focus on the current article. It is beyond the scope of the current presentation to review and discuss the other system dimensions.
4. This methodology is in keeping with Locke and Cooper's (2000) assertion that qualitative data obtained from a variety of available sources, including interviews with structured questioning, field observations, and other less quantitative methods of inquiry can legitimize an approach that is based on the integration of real-world facts.

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