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**LEADERSHIP AS A PROCESS:
THE ELEMENTS AND ROLE OF
CONTEXT/SITUATION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR
LIMINAL LEADERS**

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Abstract

Leadership is a dynamic process involving at least one leader, one follower, and a situational context. The situational context serves as a critical framework that shapes how leadership behaviors and followership behavior and interactions unfold. This article explores some of the elements that constitute the context or situation in the leadership process, including task characteristics, physical and organizational environments, external influences, relational dynamics, cultural factors, and purpose. Additionally, it introduces implications for the concept of "Liminal Leadership," which emphasizes the simultaneous roles of leading and following within dynamic and evolving contexts. By examining these elements, this paper emphasizes the importance of situational awareness and liminal thinking in effective leadership and followership, offering insights into how leaders and followers can adapt to and leverage context to enhance outcomes.

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Introduction

Leadership is often described as a relational process that exists within a broader situational framework. Unlike trait-based or behavior-based theories that focus on individual characteristics, process-oriented leadership theories highlight the interplay between leaders, followers, and the context in which they operate (Northouse, 2021). This article delves into the situational elements that shape leadership effectiveness, emphasizing their interconnectedness and role in guiding decision-making and behavior. Furthermore, the concept of Liminal Leadership is explored as a framework that recognizes the fluidity of leadership/followership roles and the necessity of navigating the "in-between" spaces of leading and following.

The Role of Context/Situation in Leadership

Context or situation provides the environment within which leadership and followership occur. It is not merely a backdrop but an active component that influences interactions, decisions, and outcomes (Yukl, 2013). By examining the situational elements, leaders can better understand how to align their strategies with the demands of the environment.

Unique Elements of Context/Situation

Every situation that a leader, follower, or liminal leader encounters is inherently unique, shaped by a diverse array of situational and contextual elements. While some factors—such as task characteristics, relational dynamics, cultural norms, and organizational structures—are commonly present, the specific combination and influence of these elements vary widely depending on the situational circumstances. Additional or differing elements, such as political landscapes, technological disruptions, or emergent crises, can further complicate the context, making each situation distinct.

This paper acknowledges the complexity and variability of leadership contexts and focuses on highlighting only some of the major situational and contextual elements that influence leadership

effectiveness. It is important to recognize that the factors discussed here represent just a portion of the broader contextual and situational landscape. Leaders, followers, and liminal leaders must remain adaptable and attuned to the unique dynamics of their environments, understanding that no two situations are entirely alike, and that success often depends on the ability to recognize, evaluate, and navigate these complexities with awareness and flexibility.

Task Characteristics

The nature of the task is foundational to the leadership process, particularly for **liminal leaders**, who simultaneously embody the roles of leader and follower. Tasks vary in **complexity**, **urgency**, and **clarity**, influencing the interactions between leaders and followers. Liminal leaders navigate these dynamics with a dual perspective, leveraging their ability to lead while remaining attuned to the needs and contributions of the group. This fluidity allows them to adapt their approach based on task requirements, fostering a collaborative and responsive environment.

Task Complexity:

For highly complex tasks involving interconnected components, innovative problem-solving, or uncertain outcomes, liminal leaders excel by adopting participative leadership styles. They actively engage with team members, leveraging the collective expertise of the group while contributing as equal participants in the problem-solving process. By balancing leadership and followership, liminal leaders encourage shared ownership of outcomes, enabling teams to address challenges creatively and effectively. For example, in multidisciplinary projects, liminal leaders foster open dialogue and collaboration, ensuring all voices are heard while steering the group toward strategic objectives.

Conversely, when tasks are straightforward or routine, liminal leaders seamlessly shift to a directive approach. They provide clear guidance and maintain focus on task execution while remaining receptive to feedback from followers. This ensures efficiency and precision without stifling input or initiative from team members.

Task Urgency:

Urgent tasks demand quick decision-making and immediate action. Liminal leaders are uniquely positioned to respond to urgency with a balanced approach. While they may assume an authoritative role to ensure timely responses, they also rely on their ability to engage followers dynamically, empowering them to act decisively within the constraints of the situation. For example, during a high-stakes situation like a medical emergency or crisis management scenario, liminal leaders draw on their dual perspective to delegate effectively while maintaining overall control and cohesion.

Task Clarity:

When tasks are ambiguous or poorly defined, liminal leaders excel by navigating uncertainty with a flexible mindset. They help clarify objectives and align team efforts while drawing on the insights and perspectives of followers. This ensures that ambiguity does not paralyze progress but instead becomes an opportunity for collective exploration and innovation. By leading and following simultaneously, liminal leaders create a safe space for experimentation, building confidence and adaptability within the team. For tasks with well-defined goals and procedures, liminal leaders empower followers to take ownership, providing support only as needed to foster autonomy and trust.

Liminal leadership enhances the traditional understanding of task-related dynamics by emphasizing adaptability, shared responsibility, and the interplay between leading and following. As Fiedler's Contingency Model (1967) suggests, effective leadership aligns with task requirements and situational factors. Liminal leaders, with their ability to fluidly transition between roles, are particularly suited to navigate this alignment, creating environments where both leaders and followers thrive in response to the nature of the task.

Physical Environment

The **physical environment** plays a crucial role in shaping the dynamics of leadership and followership by encompassing the tangible aspects of the situation, including **location, available resources, and logistical constraints**. These elements directly influence how leaders and teams interact, make decisions, and achieve goals. For instance, in **remote work environments**, leaders face unique challenges that require adaptive communication strategies and technological fluency to foster cohesion and collaboration among geographically dispersed team members (Liao, 2017).

In the context of **Liminal Leadership**, as described by Fuzie (2024), the physical environment is not merely a backdrop but a dynamic factor that both leaders and followers navigate simultaneously. Liminal leaders, who operate in the "in-between" space of leading and following, recognize the importance of tailoring their behaviors and strategies to the environmental conditions. This dual perspective allows them to leverage the physical environment as both a leader, providing structure and direction, and as a follower, responding to the needs and constraints presented by the context.

Key Applications of Liminal Leadership in Relation to the Physical Environment:

Adapting to Remote or Hybrid Work Settings:

Liminal leaders excel in environments where physical presence is limited or absent, such as remote or hybrid work contexts. They use their dual role to bridge the gap between technological

tools and human connection, ensuring that communication is both effective and empathetic (Liao, 2017). For example, a liminal leader might lead a virtual meeting by facilitating discussion and making decisions while simultaneously engaging with team members to understand their perspectives and address challenges related to technology or isolation.

Maximizing Resource Utilization:

In environments where resources are constrained—such as limited budgets, time, or physical materials—liminal leaders demonstrate creativity and adaptability. They collaborate with their teams to identify innovative solutions, recognizing that effective resource use requires input from all levels of the organization. "Their ability to lead and follow simultaneously cultivates a culture where resourcefulness is embraced as a collective responsibility." (Fuzie, 2024)

Navigating Logistical Constraints:

Whether dealing with time zone differences, physical space limitations, or complex supply chains, liminal leaders embrace the flexibility required to address logistical challenges. For instance, in a global project team working across multiple time zones, a liminal leader might facilitate asynchronous workflows while participating in team efforts to optimize scheduling and productivity. This shared approach to logistical problem-solving strengthens team cohesion and trust (Fuzie, 2024).

Enhancing Environmental Awareness:

Liminal leaders are particularly attuned to the nuances of their environment, understanding how physical spaces influence behavior, morale, and productivity. For example, in a high-stakes setting such as emergency response, they balance directive actions (e.g., coordinating resources) with receptive behaviors (e.g., listening to team members' on-the-ground observations) to adapt strategies in real time (Fuzie, 2024).

Fostering Inclusivity in Diverse Physical Environments:

When teams are distributed across different physical and cultural environments, liminal leaders promote inclusivity by acknowledging and adapting to these differences. They lead by modeling respect for diverse perspectives while following by incorporating team members' localized insights into broader strategies (Fuzie, 2024).

Integrating Liminal Leadership into Physical Environment Dynamics:

By understanding the interplay between the physical environment and human dynamics, liminal leaders create conditions that enhance adaptability, innovation, and mutual accountability. They recognize that leadership is not about imposing solutions on the environment but about working within its constraints to empower collective success. Whether navigating a virtual office, a field site, or a complex logistical operation, liminal leaders act as connectors and facilitators, ensuring that the physical environment supports—not hinders—the leadership process (Fuzie, 2024).

Ultimately, the physical environment, when approached with the principles of liminal leadership, becomes a shared space where leadership and followership coexist fluidly. This alignment

enables leaders and teams to thrive, regardless of the tangible constraints or opportunities presented by the environment.

Organizational Factors in Context

Organizational culture, structure, and policies form the internal framework within which leadership occurs. These elements not only shape how leaders interact with followers but also influence the overall effectiveness of leadership strategies. Organizational culture reflects shared values, norms, and beliefs that guide behavior within the organization, while structure defines the hierarchy and communication channels, and policies establish formal rules and procedures.

Impact of Organizational Structure:

A **hierarchical structure**, characterized by clear levels of authority and formalized roles, often necessitates more traditional or directive leadership styles. In such organizations, leaders are typically expected to provide clear guidance, enforce policies, and ensure accountability through established chains of command. This formalized approach is particularly effective in industries requiring precision and compliance, such as healthcare or manufacturing, where ambiguity can lead to costly mistakes (Schein, 2010; Mintzberg, 1979).

In contrast, **flat organizations**, which feature minimal hierarchical layers and emphasize open communication, often thrive on collaborative and participative leadership approaches. Leaders in such environments act as facilitators, encouraging innovation and leveraging the collective expertise of their teams. This approach aligns with the principles of **transformational leadership**, which fosters a culture of trust, creativity, and shared purpose (Bass & Riggio, 2006). For instance, tech startups often adopt flat structures to promote agility and empower employees to contribute actively to decision-making.

Role of Organizational Culture:

Organizational culture profoundly affects leadership styles and behaviors. **Strong cultures**—where values and norms are deeply ingrained—can either support or constrain leadership. Leaders in organizations with adaptive cultures are more likely to succeed in implementing change and fostering innovation because employees are already oriented toward flexibility and growth (Schein, 2010). Conversely, in organizations with rigid or risk-averse cultures, leaders may struggle to inspire change, as entrenched norms and resistance to innovation can create significant barriers (Kotter, 1996).

The concept of **liminal leadership**, as articulated by Fuzie (2024), is particularly relevant in navigating the interplay between organizational culture and leadership. Liminal leaders thrive in environments where they must balance adherence to established cultural norms with the need to challenge those norms to drive progress. For example, in a traditional organization undergoing

digital transformation, a liminal leader might respect existing processes while simultaneously encouraging employees to adopt new technologies and workflows.

Influence of Policies:

Organizational policies establish the boundaries within which leadership operates. Policies related to decision-making, resource allocation, and employee behavior create a framework that leaders must navigate. In highly regulated industries, policies often necessitate a directive leadership approach to ensure compliance and minimize risk (Mintzberg, 1979). However, in less regulated environments, leaders may have greater flexibility to implement participative or transformational approaches that align with organizational goals and employee needs.

Liminal leaders are particularly adept at working within and around organizational policies to achieve strategic objectives. They recognize the importance of compliance while also identifying opportunities to innovate and adapt policies to better serve the organization and its people (Fuzie, 2024).

Integrating Leadership and Organizational Frameworks:

Ultimately, the internal framework of culture, structure, and policies provides both opportunities and constraints for leadership. Effective leaders, especially those embracing liminal leadership, understand how to navigate this framework to balance stability and adaptability. Whether operating in hierarchical or flat organizations, strong or adaptive cultures, or strict or flexible policy environments, leaders must align their approaches with the specific characteristics of the organization to foster engagement, innovation, and long-term success.

External Environment

External environmental factors, such as **economic conditions, societal trends, and technological advancements**, play a significant role in shaping the broader context within which organizations and their leaders operate. These external influences not only impact the goals and strategies of an organization but also demand adaptive leadership behaviors that can address rapidly changing environments.

Economic Conditions:

Economic conditions, including recessions, inflation, or periods of economic growth, can profoundly affect organizational priorities and leadership strategies. For example, during economic downturns, leaders may need to focus on cost-cutting, efficiency, and sustaining morale amidst uncertainty (Kotter, 1996). Conversely, in periods of economic growth, leadership may center on innovation, expansion, and seizing market opportunities. Leaders must demonstrate agility by aligning their strategies with the economic climate, balancing short-term survival with long-term vision.

Societal Trends:

Societal trends, such as shifts in public attitudes toward sustainability, diversity, and social responsibility, also influence leadership practices. Organizations are increasingly expected to address these trends proactively. Leaders must remain attuned to these external pressures and integrate them into organizational goals and practices. For example, societal demands for corporate social responsibility (CSR) require leaders to champion ethical business practices, environmental stewardship, and inclusive workplace cultures (Freeman et al., 2007). Effective leaders recognize that addressing societal expectations is not only a moral imperative but also a strategic advantage in maintaining public trust and market relevance.

Technological Advancements:

Technological advancements, such as artificial intelligence (AI), automation, and digital transformation, are reshaping industries at an unprecedented pace. Leaders must stay informed about emerging technologies and their implications for their organizations. This requires a forward-thinking approach, fostering a culture of innovation while ensuring that employees are equipped to adapt to technological changes (Kotter, 1996; Fuzie, 2024). For instance, the adoption of AI in customer service may require leaders to manage workforce transitions while maintaining service quality and employee engagement.

Liminal leadership, as articulated by Fuzie (2024), is particularly well-suited for navigating the challenges posed by technological advancements. Liminal leaders balance the need to embrace disruptive innovation with the responsibility of guiding teams through periods of uncertainty. By embodying both leader and follower roles, they can foster collaboration, mitigate resistance to change, and ensure smooth transitions during technological shifts.

Regulatory Changes and Market Demands:

External pressures such as regulatory changes and shifting market demands require leaders to remain agile and responsive. Regulatory changes often necessitate quick adjustments in compliance policies, operational processes, and reporting standards. Leaders in these scenarios must adopt directive and decisive strategies to ensure compliance while minimizing disruptions to business operations (Mintzberg, 1979). Simultaneously, shifts in market demands—such as changing consumer preferences or competitive pressures—call for creative and strategic thinking. Leaders must engage with stakeholders to identify opportunities for differentiation and growth, often requiring participative leadership styles to gather insights and foster innovation (Freeman et al., 2007).

Integrating Leadership and External Contexts:

Effective leadership in the face of external factors hinges on adaptability, foresight, and collaboration. Leaders must continually monitor the external environment, anticipate challenges, and pivot their strategies as needed. Liminal leaders, in particular, thrive in this context by

leveraging their ability to operate in both leading and following roles, engaging their teams to co-create solutions while driving the organization forward (Fuzie, 2024). This dynamic approach enables organizations to remain resilient and competitive, even amidst rapidly changing external conditions.

Relational Dynamics in Context/Situation

Leadership is inherently relational, and the dynamics between leaders, followers, and stakeholders play a pivotal role in determining the success of leadership efforts. These relational dynamics are shaped by **power structures, trust, and communication channels**, which together define the nature and quality of interactions. Understanding and effectively managing these elements is critical for leaders seeking to inspire, influence, and align others toward shared goals.

Power Structures

Power structures, both formal and informal, significantly influence relational dynamics within organizations. Formal power arises from positional authority, such as a leader's role in the organizational hierarchy, while informal power stems from personal attributes like expertise, charisma, or relationships. According to French and Raven's (1959) bases of power, leaders draw on various sources of power, including legitimate, reward, coercive, referent, and expert power, to influence others. Effective leaders balance these power sources to create an environment where influence is exercised responsibly and collaboratively.

Liminal leaders, as described by Fuzie (2024), navigate power structures with a dual perspective, recognizing their own influence while actively engaging as followers when necessary. This approach fosters mutual respect and empowers others to contribute meaningfully to organizational goals. For example, a liminal leader in a cross-functional team might leverage their positional authority to secure resources while simultaneously encouraging team members to take ownership of specific tasks, creating a sense of shared accountability.

Trust

Trust is a foundational element of effective relational dynamics. High levels of trust between leaders, followers, and stakeholders enhance collaboration, reduce resistance to change, and improve overall organizational performance (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002). Trust is built through consistent, transparent, and ethical behavior, as well as by demonstrating competence and empathy in decision-making. Leaders who invest in relationship-building and actively address conflicts are more likely to sustain trust even in challenging circumstances.

For liminal leaders, trust is especially important as they oscillate between leading and following roles. By modeling vulnerability and openness, liminal leaders build psychological safety within

teams, encouraging honest communication and risk-taking (Fuzie, 2024). This relational foundation enables teams to navigate complex challenges with greater cohesion and resilience.

Communication Channels

Effective communication is the backbone of relational dynamics in leadership. Leaders must establish clear, open, and multi-directional communication channels to ensure that information flows efficiently and misunderstandings are minimized. Graen and Uhl-Bien's (1995) Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) theory highlights the importance of high-quality leader-follower relationships, characterized by mutual respect, trust, and open communication. Leaders who foster such relationships are better able to engage their teams and align them with organizational objectives.

Liminal leaders excel in creating adaptive communication channels that reflect their dual perspective. They actively listen to followers, ensuring that diverse viewpoints are incorporated into decision-making, while also articulating clear visions and expectations. For example, during periods of organizational change, liminal leaders might facilitate two-way communication by holding open forums, gathering feedback, and providing regular updates to maintain alignment and trust.

Integrating Relational Dynamics into Leadership Practice

Relational dynamics are central to leadership effectiveness, as they influence how power is exercised, trust is built, and communication flows. Leaders who understand and manage these dynamics create environments where collaboration, innovation, and shared accountability thrive. Liminal leadership adds an additional layer of relational nuance, as leaders simultaneously engage as influencers and collaborators, fostering deeper connections and a sense of shared purpose within their teams (Fuzie, 2024). By prioritizing relational dynamics, leaders can enhance their strategies and ensure sustainable organizational success.

Cultural Environment

Cultural norms and diversity play a pivotal role in shaping leadership dynamics and practices. Leadership is not a one-size-fits-all endeavor, and the cultural context significantly influences how leaders and followers perceive and interact with each other. Leaders who recognize and adapt to these cultural nuances are better equipped to foster inclusivity, alignment, and effective collaboration across diverse teams.

High-Context vs. Low-Context Cultures

One key distinction in cultural norms lies in the difference between **high-context** and **low-context cultures**. High-context cultures, such as those found in many Asian, Middle Eastern, and Latin American countries, emphasize the importance of relationship-building, non-verbal communication, and implicit understanding in leadership interactions. In these cultures, trust and

loyalty are foundational, and leaders often invest significant time in nurturing personal connections before addressing task-related matters (Hall, 1976; Hofstede, 2001).

In contrast, low-context cultures, such as those in the United States, Germany, and Scandinavian countries, prioritize task-oriented interactions and direct communication. Leaders in these contexts focus on efficiency, clear instructions, and measurable outcomes. For instance, in a low-context setting, a leader might immediately address project deadlines and deliverables, while in a high-context setting, the same leader might first engage in informal conversations to build rapport before discussing work objectives.

Navigating Cultural Nuances

Effective leaders must navigate these cultural differences by adopting a culturally intelligent approach. **Cultural intelligence (CQ)** refers to the ability to recognize, understand, and adapt to cultural differences in various settings (Earley & Ang, 2003). Leaders with high CQ are not only aware of the cultural norms that shape behavior but also capable of modifying their leadership styles to suit the cultural expectations of their teams. For example, in a multicultural team, a leader might balance high-context and low-context approaches by building personal relationships while also ensuring clear communication of goals and expectations.

Embracing Diversity in Leadership

Diversity extends beyond cultural norms to include factors such as race, gender, age, and professional background. Leaders who embrace diversity within their teams foster a culture of inclusivity, where diverse perspectives are valued and leveraged for innovation and decision-making. Research shows that diverse teams are more creative and better at problem-solving, as they bring varied viewpoints and experiences to the table (Hunt et al., 2015). However, the benefits of diversity can only be realized when leaders actively create environments that promote equity and respect.

Liminal leaders, as described by Fuzie (2024), are uniquely suited to navigate the complexities of cultural diversity. By simultaneously leading and following, they create a sense of shared ownership and mutual respect within diverse teams. For example, a liminal leader might facilitate dialogue between culturally distinct subgroups, ensuring that all voices are heard while aligning the team toward common goals.

Cultural Norms, Diversity, and Inclusivity

Cultural norms and diversity require leaders to adopt a mindset of inclusivity and adaptability. Leaders who are sensitive to cultural nuances and open to diverse perspectives not only foster alignment but also create environments where innovation and collaboration thrive. By balancing respect for cultural norms with the need to achieve organizational objectives, leaders can build trust, enhance engagement, and drive sustainable success. As the global workforce becomes

increasingly diverse, the ability to navigate these dynamics is not just a skill but a necessity for effective leadership.

Context in Crisis vs. Stability

The **situational context** within which leadership occurs often oscillates between periods of **stability** and **crisis**, requiring leaders to adapt their strategies and behaviors accordingly. Stable conditions allow leaders to focus on **long-term planning, development, and sustained organizational growth**, whereas crises necessitate **rapid decision-making, adaptability, and resilience** to navigate uncertainty effectively (Heifetz et al., 2009). Leaders who can transition seamlessly between these contexts demonstrate a higher capacity for sustained effectiveness.

Leadership in Stability

During stable periods, leadership can prioritize strategic planning, resource optimization, and team development. Stability provides a fertile ground for leaders to foster innovation, build organizational culture, and align resources with long-term goals. According to Yukl (2013), leaders in stable contexts are well-positioned to engage in **transformational leadership**, inspiring and motivating their teams to achieve higher levels of performance and innovation. They can also focus on **developmental leadership**, investing in the growth of their teams through mentoring, training, and skill-building initiatives.

Liminal leaders, as described by Fuzie (2024), thrive in stable environments by balancing their roles as leaders and collaborators. For example, a liminal leader might guide their team in setting long-term objectives while participating actively in the problem-solving processes that refine these goals. This collaborative approach ensures that all team members feel engaged and invested in the organization's future.

Leadership in Crisis

Crises, on the other hand, present unique challenges that require leaders to pivot toward **adaptive leadership** to address rapidly changing circumstances (Heifetz et al., 2009). In crisis situations, leaders must make quick, high-stakes decisions, often with incomplete information. They must also manage the emotional and psychological impacts of the crisis on their teams, maintaining focus and cohesion in the face of uncertainty.

In such contexts, leaders often adopt a **directive leadership style**, providing clear instructions, decisive action, and consistent communication to navigate the immediate challenges (Mintzberg, 1979). However, effective crisis leadership also involves **adaptive behaviors**, such as seeking input from key stakeholders, remaining flexible to changing circumstances, and learning from the crisis to prevent future disruptions (Heifetz et al., 2009).

Liminal leadership offers distinct advantages in crisis scenarios. Liminal leaders excel at maintaining composure while fostering collaboration and innovation within their teams. By shifting between leading and following roles, they can balance the need for decisive action with the insights and expertise of their teams. For instance, during a natural disaster response, a liminal leader might take charge in coordinating logistics while also incorporating feedback from frontline workers to adjust strategies in real time.

Transitioning Between Stability and Crisis

One of the hallmarks of effective leadership is the ability to transition seamlessly between stable and crisis contexts. Leaders must develop the situational awareness and emotional intelligence necessary to recognize when conditions are shifting and adapt their strategies accordingly (Goleman, 1995). During such transitions, communication becomes paramount. Leaders must articulate the changes clearly, set realistic expectations, and provide guidance to help their teams adjust.

Liminal leaders are particularly adept at navigating these transitions. By embodying the dual roles of leader and collaborator, they can bridge the gap between stability and crisis, ensuring that the organization remains agile and resilient. For example, a liminal leader might use stable periods to prepare their team for potential crises, fostering a culture of adaptability and resilience that positions the organization to respond effectively when challenges arise.

Integrating Stability and Crisis Leadership

The situational context underscores the importance of adaptability in leadership. Whether operating in stable or crisis conditions, leaders must align their strategies with the demands of the moment. Stability provides opportunities for growth and innovation, while crises test the resilience and agility of both leaders and teams. Leaders who can navigate this oscillation effectively—such as liminal leaders—create organizations that are both initiative-taking and responsive, capable of thriving in diverse circumstances.

Purpose: The Guiding Force in Leadership

Purpose serves as the foundational guiding force within the situational context of leadership, defining the "why" behind leadership efforts and driving alignment between leaders and followers. A clearly articulated and shared purpose provides direction, fosters unity, and instills meaning in the actions of individuals and teams. As Sinek (2009) emphasizes in his "Golden Circle" framework, successful leaders inspire action by communicating a compelling purpose that resonates deeply with their teams, starting with "why" before addressing "how" and "what." This emphasis on purpose cultivates intrinsic motivation, as individuals feel connected to a cause larger than themselves.

A shared purpose not only aligns the efforts of leaders and followers but also serves as a critical anchor during times of uncertainty or crisis. When teams face ambiguity, a well-defined purpose provides clarity and a sense of direction, enabling individuals to prioritize tasks and make decisions consistent with overarching goals (Heifetz et al., 2009). For example, in nonprofit organizations, where resources may be constrained, a strong sense of purpose often drives employee engagement and resilience, as team members remain committed to their mission despite challenges (Kirkpatrick, 2016).

Purpose and Relational Dynamics

Purpose also plays a pivotal role in shaping relational dynamics between leaders and followers. Leaders who consistently communicate a shared purpose cultivate trust and loyalty, as followers perceive them as authentic and aligned with organizational values (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002). This trust fosters a collaborative environment where individuals are more willing to engage, innovate, and take calculated risks. Additionally, when a shared purpose is co-created through participative leadership, followers feel a greater sense of ownership and accountability for achieving collective goals (Yukl, 2013).

In the context of **liminal leadership**, as described by Fuzie (2024), purpose acts as the compass that guides leaders as they transition fluidly between leading and following roles. Liminal leaders use purpose to unify teams, ensuring that both their directive actions and collaborative efforts align with organizational objectives. For instance, during organizational change, a liminal leader may leverage the shared purpose as a rallying point, ensuring that employees remain focused and motivated despite the inherent challenges of transformation.

Purpose and Organizational Success

Ultimately, purpose is a powerful driver of organizational success, serving as both a strategic and emotional cornerstone for leadership. Organizations with a clear, well-communicated purpose often experience higher levels of employee engagement, innovation, and resilience, as individuals and teams draw meaning and motivation from their work (Sinek, 2009; Kirkpatrick, 2016). For leaders, purpose is not just a rhetorical tool but a practical framework for decision-making, prioritization, and relationship-building. By aligning their actions with a shared purpose, leaders can create environments where both individuals and organizations thrive.

Liminal Leadership: Navigating the In-Between

Liminal Leadership is a conceptual framework that highlights the simultaneous roles of leading and following, particularly in dynamic and evolving contexts. Derived from the term "liminality," meaning a transitional or threshold state, this approach recognizes that leadership is not a fixed position but a fluid process (Fuzie, 2024). Liminal leaders:

- **Adapt to Changing Contexts:** Navigate uncertainty and ambiguity by balancing decisiveness with receptivity.
- **Engage in Mutual Influence:** Acknowledge the interplay between leading and following, fostering collaborative decision-making.
- **Embrace Transitional Spaces:** Operate effectively in moments of transition, where roles and expectations are evolving.

Liminal Leadership provides a lens for understanding how leaders can move seamlessly between leading and following roles, leveraging situational awareness to guide their actions.

Integrating Contextual Awareness in Leadership

To maximize effectiveness, leaders must develop situational awareness—the ability to perceive, interpret, and act upon contextual factors (Endsley, 1995). This involves:

- **Assessing Contextual Elements:** Identifying and analyzing the situational factors present in the environment.
- **Adapting Leadership Styles:** Modifying behaviors and approaches to align with contextual demands.
- **Leveraging Liminal Leadership:** Recognizing and embracing the fluidity of leadership roles to navigate complex environments.
- **Aligning with Purpose:** Ensuring that all actions are rooted in a shared and clearly communicated purpose.

Conclusion

Leadership, as a dynamic process, cannot be disentangled from its context. The situational elements—such as task characteristics, physical and organizational environments, external and cultural influences, relational dynamics, and the oscillation between stability and crisis—serve as the backdrop against which leadership behaviors and strategies unfold. These contextual factors shape how leaders and followers interact, influencing decision-making, trust-building, and overall effectiveness (Heifetz et al., 2009; Schein, 2010). Understanding the interplay between these elements allows leaders to adopt more situationally appropriate approaches, tailoring their leadership to the specific demands of the moment. For instance, leaders who can identify and adapt to cultural norms, navigate power structures, and foster inclusivity within diverse teams are better positioned to achieve meaningful and sustainable outcomes (Earley & Ang, 2003; Hofstede, 2001).

The concept of **Liminal Leadership**, as articulated by Fuzie (2024), provides a critical framework for navigating these complexities. By embracing the dual roles of leading and

following, liminal leaders are uniquely equipped to adapt to changing circumstances while maintaining alignment with organizational goals and values. This approach underscores the importance of flexibility, collaboration, and shared accountability in modern leadership. Liminal leaders thrive in environments of uncertainty, using their ability to oscillate between directive and participative styles to bridge gaps, foster innovation, and inspire trust (Fuzie, 2024). Future research should delve deeper into how liminal thinking intersects with these contextual elements, exploring how leaders can cultivate the skills necessary for situational adaptability and resilience. Additionally, empirical studies could examine the long-term impact of liminal leadership on organizational performance, innovation, and employee engagement, providing actionable insights for leaders in a rapidly evolving world.

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