



## Consciousness of Context



### ◀ Focus

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Consciousness of context means thinking intentionally about the environment of a leadership situation. The larger system, or environment, has notable influence on an individual's ability to lead. Similarly, the situation and setting in which leadership occurs are important factors for consideration. Aspects of the environment directly affect the psychological and interpersonal dynamics of any human interaction. Being conscious of the context entails recognizing a variety of environmental factors such as community traditions and customs, the political environment, and even small group dynamics.

### ◀ Learning Objectives

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- To explore what consciousness of context means
- To learn about how the physical environment influences a leadership opportunity
- To learn how to identify key internal and external factors that may influence leadership

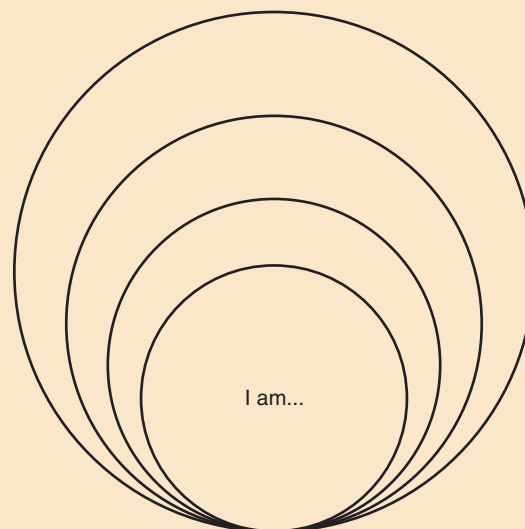
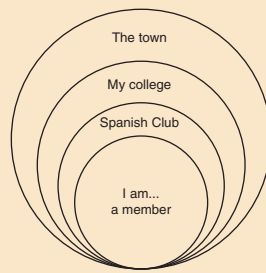
## Consciousness of Context Module 1, Activity 1: Identifying Context

*By Marcy Levy Shankman and Scott J. Allen*

### Concentric Circles

As suggested in the example below, fill in the rings of the blank circle with the different dimensions of context for a group (formal or informal) that is familiar to you. This could be an organization in which you're a member or leader or even a friendship group. How many more rings can you add to the circle?

Example:





## Consciousness of Context

### Module 1, Activity 2: Context Fieldtrip

**By Marcy Levy Shankman and Scott J. Allen**

Completing the following chart will help you better understand the different contexts that you experience. Throughout the course of a day or a week, complete the chart, reflecting the groups or organizations to which you belong and the factors that influence them. Each group or organization should be considered in light of its particular setting and situation. The more you begin to see the layers of influence, the more attuned you will become to seeing the role that context plays in exercising leadership. Remember to consider informal groups that you're a part of like a group of friends or those with whom you live or regularly interact (like a class).

#### **A few questions to consider:**

##### Setting:

- What is the internal structure of the group?
- How is it organized?
- What formal positions and/or committees exist?
- What larger group or entity includes your group or organization?
- What are the set expectations or rules for operating?
- What is the physical location in which the group or organization operates?

##### Situation:

- What is happening at present?
- What are the internal challenges?
- Where is the focus of energy for the group?
- What outside factors are influencing decisions that are being made?
- What outside factors are causing stress?
- What opportunities exist because of the current situation?

*(Continued)*





## Consciousness of Context Module 1, Activity 3: Reflection

**By Marcy Levy Shankman and Scott J. Allen**

Consider the following student quotes about how context relates to leadership.

When external forces make a team's work seem more relevant, it's easier to inspire group members and feel as though I'm impacting what is happening in a positive manner.



The environment has a large impact on how effectively a group can operate. If a group is willing to participate and has a high energy level, then I feel more compelled to have a similar attitude. If a group doesn't show interest, though, it sometimes seems better just to give up.



Environment can either make or break leadership ability. If you are working around others in an environment where they fully support your duties, you will succeed many times over. If you are constantly battling for credibility, it will start to feel troublesome or hopeless.



I feel that sometimes the environment is one that you create, and sometimes it is created by others. If I am placed in a position to lead, I would hope that it would be one where everyone's ideas can be expressed.



The environment describes the mood, almost what I want to call the "integrity" of the organization or group. If it's a positive

*(Continued)*

environment, that's great, but when it lacks support and communication, there is room for error and even failure.



If you are in an environment that is hostile or work with people you don't get along with, then you can't focus on your work and as a result your organization's efficiency suffers. Also, an environment where you do not get feedback from your superiors leaves you wondering if you are doing a good job. Effective communication, supportive or critical, is essential.

### **Reflection questions**

1. Which quote makes the most sense to you? Why?
2. Which quote do you think is the most controversial? Why?
3. Based on these observations, what might you consider doing differently the next time you have the opportunity to lead?

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## ← Student Quotes

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My environment influences and affects my ability to lead my organization, groups, or teams in a major way. The factors of an emotionally safe and welcoming environment are weighted much more heavily for me when dealing with my different organizations and groups. Establishing a healthy working environment is crucial for creating a synergistic team.



I think there is a level of comfort associated with every environment. That level of comfort, whether comfortable or uncomfortable, leads to differences in how I can lead. The environment plays a factor when it comes to space, resources, and outside factors that may distract or aggravate the group. The environment either acts as a catalyst or deterrent for everything you do.



An environment that I feel comfortable in is a huge factor on my ability to lead. If I feel that I am in the kind of place where I can say what I want and take charge, then I am more likely to lead. However, if a teacher, advisor, or another student is imposing or not inviting, I often have the feeling that I want to just sit back and not be noticed.



I believe it is beneficial for groups to operate in a variety of environments. This could mean having meetings or events in different places, varying how organizations interact, etc.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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Pink, D. H. (2005). *A whole new mind: Moving from the information age to the conceptual age*. New York: Riverhead Books.

Schein, E. H. (1992). *Organizational culture and leadership*, 3rd ed. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Senge, P. (1990). *The fifth discipline: The art and practice of the learning organization*. New York: Doubleday.

Wheatley, M. J. (1992). *Leadership and the new science: Learning about organization from an orderly universe*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.