Beyond the Grid
and Situationalism:
A Living Systems View

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Anyone following the "Managerial Grid vs. Situational Leadership" approaches to managerial development will be interested in the latest round of claims and counter-claims that have spilled over into the pages of the *Training and Development Journal*. The February 1982 issue contained an attack by Robert Blake and Jane Mouton on the scientific validity and practical use of Paul Hersey and Ken Blanchard's Situational Leadership Theory.[1] The May 1982 issue carried a Hersey-Blanchard rebuttal that described Blake and Mouton's Grid as an "attitudinal/strategic" approach, claiming their work covers the "behavioral/tactical" field.[2]

The foursome has been at odds over the relative merits of the "One Best Way" vs. the "situationally-determined way." This represents a new chapter in the controversy, as Blake and Mouton have literally thrown down the "scientific" gauntlet in an effort to win the favor of training and development practitioners.

Blake and Mouton's indictment of Situationalism pales in comparison to the stinging attack launched by Jay Hall in his monthly essay in Braniff International's travel magazine *Flying Colors*. Hall branded Situa-

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tionalism a là Hersey and Blanchard, as "slipshod scholarship," "good marketing," "lousy psychology" and "a little bit like Goebbel's Big Lie," without a "scintilla of scientific support." This "rip-off," he claims, is not the product of "trained psychologists." Hall concludes: "management consulting doesn't fall within the consumer fraud statute!" Exerting strong feelings on this issue, both ethical as well as practical, Hall pleads for

us to "eschew the quick fix and manage according to tested and enduring principles."[3]

At first, one can view this controversy as a positive sign for our profession: these differences are being openly debated, as opposed to the traditional "foil and counter-foil" thrusts at each other from one-sided platforms in front of captive audiences. The *Journal* is to be commended for contributing to the maturity of our deliberations by offering its pages to opposing sides of critical and often controversial issues. I hope this commitment to open inquiry will permeate ASTD's national conferences and symposia as well.

A great deal is at stake in this "Hatfield and McCoy confronta-

tion" between these two camps. In addition to their respective concepts, training packages, videotapes and assumptions regarding the nature of leadership, both have published definitive textbooks and new editions on the subject.[4] Both stage elaborate seminars across the country and abroad and feverishly attempt to recruit others who will purchase their materials after they have been properly "certified." Last

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A "top-of-the-fence" view of "situationalism" and "one-best-style"...

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month's mail brought a brochure from Paul Hersey listing currently available learning kits from his organization. On the same day, I received a flyer from Ken Blanchard, currently working apart from his former colleague, offering an "alternative approach to situational leadership training." The alternative featured a three-panel graphic display which provided an easy-to-remember approach and step-by-step instructions on how to become a more effective manager by applying the three secrets of "The One Minute Manager."

Blake and Mouton, through their company, Scientific Methods, Inc. (The Grid Company), are a bit more sedate in their brochures. They, however,

reminded us that they were to present a general session at the 1982 ASTD National Conference on "Horizontal Leadership—The Key to Productivity" and would be represented in booth #228 in the exhibit hall. The defense of their "One Best Way" and their attack on "Situationalism" is a recurring theme in their publications, presentations and writings. All parties, however, are investing time and energy to out-research, out-claim, out-maneuver and perhaps even out-market each other.

What does all of this mean to professional theorists, researchers and practitioners within the human resource community—both in the academic arena and within the marketplace? Is this controversy a sign of health or sickness in our profession? What are the ethical questions involved—if any? How can the buyer detect the differences between the hucksters and the constructive providers of ideas and reliable training programs?

While the specific drama that we are assessing has Blake, Mouton, Hersey and Blanchard "on stage" in their respective roles, perhaps we are witnessing, as a microcosm, a scene that could just as easily "star" a number of *us* as actors. We are a trendy sort—quick to pick up on, adapt and claim as our own whatever ideas we think we can use in this highly competitive business. No wonder our theories are hollow, our treatment modalities are cosmetic and our ethics are often questionable!

I have used both Grid and Situationalism approaches extensively in university teaching and research, as well as in applied settings. I am fascinated by both, appreciate the clarity of the models and respect the hard work and zeal of their proponents. I would suggest, however, two propositions for consideration—both of which I should heed, myself, as well as share:

• *The primary reason for the intensive competitiveness between the Grid and Situationalism is*

not because of their basic differences, but because they are so much alike. Both are latter-day revelations of the classic Ohio State leadership studies; both compete for the same marketplace; both view the human brain as a tabula rasa on which one can make 9,9 or S2 etchings; both float in Toffler's "second wave"; and both use a similar research design and often commit post hoc fallacies by claiming that their respective programs were the "single cause" that produced a specific effect in managerial behavior or productivity improvement.

Both are "right" in the sense that their systems are the end-products of the philosophical presuppositions and world views of each of the authors. Both are "right" in that their conclusions are consistent with the world views of various research populations and, in many cases, "fit" the problems that respective clients confront. They are both "wrong," however, when they attempt to cover the entire psychological or managerial landscape with their formulae—or claim that the world, both now and in the future, will fit within their quadrants. Given their assumptions, populations and problems, they are both "right" yet "wrong" in a "Catch-22" version of our profession. But, this is also the case with other theoretical designs.

• *The Grid and Situationalism, in theory and practice, are the manifestations of a passing paradigm.* The theoretical positions, research methodologies, training technologies and diagnostic prisms reflect the Newtonian, Baconian, Cartesian and Lockean views of the universe.[5] While their kaleidoscopic views may differ slightly, they simply rearrange the same pieces of glass with the identical color combinations. The patterns they see use the same building blocks and are assorted in similar mosaics.

Their language is empirical, their models are both mechanistic and geometric, their testing systems employ left-brain "snap-

shots" and they view human beings as "changeable" and "trainable," based on their receiving the "answers"—whether couched in "One Best Way" or "Situational" terms.

They are not alone within this paradigm prism. Many of us use the same kaleidoscope and continue to act as though the universe is static, the laws of human behavior are finite and "good training" can produce "good managers."

The Grid and Situationalism: cut from the same cloth

When you strip the Grid and Situational Leadership from their marketing claims, attractive packages, validation studies and conflicting personalities, you cannot help but be struck by their basic similarities. They articulate common themes, use the same shopping list of major theorists to support their claims (Argyris, Likert, McGregor, Berne, etc.) and perceive and address some of the same problems in management and organizational life. Blake and Mouton are certain that 9,9 has the flexibility to deal with M^1, M^2, M^3 and M^4 situations. Hersey and Blanchard are convinced that they operationalize the 9,9 "concern for both people and production" within their S^1, S^2, S^3 and S^4 spread of strategies.

If you pay attention to the rhetoric, however, they appear to be miles apart in terms of concepts and procedures. From my viewpoint, (and I make no claims of pure objectivity) I sense four primary and inherent similarities between the two approaches.

First, both of these systems are but theoretical models that approximate what they view the world to be like—they are not "the world" themselves. Like any other symbolic form, they are but sketchy and imperfect maps of the territory; they are not THE territory. There is no 9,9 leader or M^2 follower. A "statistical 5,5" exists only in the statistics files at Scientific Methods. But, just because a theoretical model cannot enfold *all* that is there in a situation,

doesn't mean it is not of use in dealing with *some* of what is there. The heat of marketing and competition, alas, often clouds our judgment and we overstate our position, forgetting that all theoretical models are only apparitions within our minds.

Second, both systems have constructed geometric maps based on quantification, objectivism and number gathering data dumps that use self-reporting pencil-and-paper instrumentation. The heavy left-brain hemisphere bias in both systems is likewise reflected in the data-gathering techniques. The Grid, in particular, makes prolific use of these Newtonian/Cartesian research procedures. Blake and Mouton's most recent article in the *Journal* (Feb. 1982) was a clear demonstration of that category of thinking. The Hersey and Blanchard LEAD questionnaire describes 12 managerial situations and provides four different choices in terms of leadership options. These four options are keyed to their S[1] through S[4] strategies. The Grid authors constructed a fifth option—one that, in their opinion, reflected the 9,9 set of assumptions. They then presented this modified research package to a group of selected "seasoned" managers who, according to their statistics, preferred the 9,9 option over the other four designed by Hersey and Blanchard. In this head-to-head competition, Blake and Mouton concluded that they now have "scientific proof" that the "One Best Style" is superior to "Situationalism" and that the entire Situational premise should be rejected in favor of the Grid.

I don't know how one can build a legitimate theory of management on the basis of any 12-item verbal test. I assume that if it can be built in this fashion, it can also be discredited. This is not just a criticism of the Grid testing systems or Hersey and Blanchard's LEAD questionnaire. It is, however, a direct criticism of the entire genre of testing approaches that assume one can actually "measure" a person or determine one's "style" through

this self-reporting, left-hemisphere dominated technique.

Third, both systems take great delight in forcing other theoretical viewpoints into their quadrants to "piggy-back" onto the validity of the other major theoretical viewpoints. Blake and Mouton's *New Managerial Grid* contains an entire section entitled "Catalog of Approaches to Human Relationships Through a Grid Framework," demonstrating how all other approaches fit within the Grid matrix. They literally take the reader from A to Z, from Argyris to Znznieck. To their credit, they are always

Fourth, both concepts are essentially attitudinal/behavior models that deal only with the surface of human activity. They are both lax in considering such subterranean influences as brain maps and programs, belief structures or value systems and world views. Neither acknowledges the rapid advancement in brain theory or the exploding new information from the fields of psychobiology and the neurosciences. Like other psychological and managerial theories, they literally stop at the human nose.

In terms of the Grid, there still seems to be little recognition of

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thorough, systematic and comprehensive in their publications.

In chapter 13 of Hersey and Blanchard's latest edition of *Management of Organizational Behavior*, they attempt to synthesize other theorists within their categories. While they take great pains to describe "maturity vs. immaturity" as only pertaining to specific tasks to be performed (and not to an individual's state of psychological health), they digress from that theme by lining up various psychological theories along the M[1] to M[4] continuum. Thus, an M[3] is a person of "high achievement motivation" who accepts the "I'm OK, you're not OK" life position, while only an M[4] gets to be well rounded and "self-actualizing." M[1] and M[2] are, according to their comparative studies, a bit more deprived. Abraham Maslow may have needed "specific instructions and closely supervised peformance" when it came to learning how to operate an Apple II computer— placing him within an M[1] or M[2] category. Maybe he was not self-actualized on computers!

the myriad of tributaries that feed into the formation of leaders or followers as "people." The same "concern for people" dimension in their matrix may be either genuinely humanistic or manipulatively self-serving for the leader. One cannot detect the difference. Likewise, little attention is paid by Grid advocates in accounting for the internal diversity within the "followers" in terms of these filtering systems. While they accuse Hersey and Blanchard of being Skinnerians, with no interest in the "black boxes" within the human brain, they, too, demonstrate in both theory and practice only a sketchy awareness of that variable. The thrust of the Grid is on what leaders do to followers—not, necessarily what followers do to leaders.

Yet, the 9,9 configuration is an excellent managerial prescription for many situations in this country—especially the way it is currently operationally defined by Blake and Mouton. In a sense, The Grid (1964) is not The Grid (1982). Both the Grid theory and systematic training sequences

will be just as popular among those "mind-sets" today, as those who found it attractive during the last two decades. Other mind-sets, however, will view it as too rigid, linear and sterile. All of these are "right"—given their own sets of assumptions.

While proponents of Situational Leadership make an attempt to look at the leader/follower trans-action through more of a Fred Fielder-inspired "follower" view-point, they miss an opportunity to push out of their behavioral constraints by examining *why* a particular person is "unable" to do the work or is "unwilling" to do so. To simply fix on those behaviors without asking *why* the follower is responding the way he or she is, places one in the position of using a formalized "cookie-cutter" in four shapes of S. Two people may be located in the M^2 group, within the continuum on both task and relation-ship dimensions, but may be quite different in their value systems. The use of the S^2 prescriptions, simply and situa-tionally calibrated for the M^2 group, would be similar to a form of "Russian roulette." A great deal would be at stake for both the employee and the organization.

The Grid and Situationalism have so much in common, in their theoretical underpinnings and the form of their populariza-tion, that I must rationalize the current controversy on other grounds. One stacks the quadrants on top of each other; the other lays them side by side. One traps people within the 9,9 corner as the ultimate; the other hems people within the S^4 niche. Thus, both have defined the limits to "growth" and "maturi-ty"—regardless of the problems of existence being confronted by the individual, organization or society. When we focus on just the two, however, they appear to be different. But, when you begin to think about them against the backdrop of the im-pact of neurotransmitters on decision making, or the input, throughput and output cycles within living systems manage-

ment, you begin to sense they have been cut from the same psychological cloth.

The Grid, Situationalism and the passing paradigm

In his recent book *The Turning Point: Science, and the Rising Culture*, Fritjof Capra suggests, "What we need is a new *paradigm*—a new vision of reali-ty, a fundamental change in our thoughts, perceptions and values. The beginnings of this change, of the shift from the mechanistic to the holistic conception of reality, are already visible in all fields and are likely to dominate the present decade."[6]

Capra's vision of reality is based on an awareness, spawned by the new physics, of the essen-tial interrelatedness and interde-pendency of all phenomena— physical, biological, psychological and cultural. In rejecting the world views of older physics, this emerging view is based on the in-ternal plasticity and flexibility of living systems, whose function is controlled by dynamic relations within a situation, rather than rigid mechanical structures.

Capra contrasts, in con-siderable detail, the Newton-ian/mechanistic view, dominated by linear, geometric, exploitative, empirical, world-is-a-machine thinking, with the world view, developing from ancient religions and modern physics, clothed in such language as organic, holistic, ecological, fluid and systemic.

James Jean noted, "Today there is a wide measure of agree-ment that the stream of knowledge is heading toward a non-mechanical reality; the universe begins to look more like a great thought than a great machine."[7]

This same transition formed the basis for the dialogue be-tween David Jamieson and Robert Tannenbaum in the April 1982 issue of the *Training and Development Journal*. Tannen-baum observed, "The notions which guided earlier management and organizational theory were essentially mechanistic views. Every part of the machine (organization) and how it was to

If, indeed, a new paradigm is unfolding before our eyes, we have reason to challenge the assortment of assumptions and pro-grams that carry the im-print of the older view.

function were clearly defined in advance."[8]

These "notions" or views of reality that dominate a culture, particularly in the area of the philosophy of science, will ultimately influence if not deter-mine their elaboration in other aspects of human life. A scien-tific paradigm, consequently, will express itself in a specific percep-tion of the function of the human brain, the accepted psychology of the species, the attitudes toward organization and management and the design of training and development activities.

If, indeed, a new paradigm is unfolding before our eyes, we have reason to challenge the assortment of assumptions and programs that carry the imprint of the older view. Thomas S. Kuhn warns in his classic study of paradigm shifts, "The death of the old and emergence of the new typically occur within a con-text of violence, conflict and recriminations as the advocates of the old way cling to one or another of the older views, and they are simply read out of the profession, which thereafter ig-nores their work."

The older paradigm

If the world view is Newtonian, the brain will be seen as mechanistic with separately func-tioning parts; psychology will be dominated by categories, types of people, with the mind and body separate; organizations will be static, linear, hierarchical, with a clear division of labor and dif-ferentiated levels of responsibility and status; training and develop-ment will be directed toward manipulation, engineering people to fit jobs and managerial desires.

with highly categorized, compartmentalized and fragmented activities.

The emerging paradigm

If the world view is holistic, the brain will be seen as an organic/holistic mosaic influx with constantly changing gestalts; psychology will fuse biological and sociological models that define a human being as a total living system; organizations will be seen as synergistic processes in constant motion with the flow of the arrangement of people determined by the flow of the function; training and development will be closely integrated into the basic organizational or societal processes and tuned to the natural way and time that different people "learn" and "develop."

Both the Managerial Grid and Situational Leadership are, at their respective theoretical cores, products of Newtonian-thinking paradigms and, in a real sense, represent the best of that tradition. This does not infer that both systems have remained frozen and have failed to make adjustment to emerging problems. While both have made significant *content* changes, they still view the world through the same mechanistic *structures*. Blake and Mouton's interest in "horizontal leadership" is certainly evidence of that. But, why do they continue to structure the world in terms of the two-dimensional Grid? Why don't they consider adding a third dimension—or even a fourth? A "Concern for Self" might be one option. And even a "Concern for Life—all planetary life" might be another.

If you examine Blake and Mouton's terminology closely, you will see evidence of the driving force behind the Grid and its application. Note the Newtonian threads in the following expressions:
• "Behavioral science principles";
• "Scientifically-based research discipline";
• "Science of leadership";
• "Certain constant principles undergird sound leadership, just as constant principles of physics undergird sound engineering";
• "The major premise of science is that nature is characterized by regularities, human nature as well, that are subject to identification."

This "scientific" thinking, as applied to management, was essential in advancing the profession out of the myth, dogma and punitiveness of sweat shops and exploitation by despots. Likewise, this focus on "behavioral sciences," in the post-Sputnik age, was instrumental in shifting the thinking of many traditional managers and engineers into a focus on the needs of people. Just as Newtonian thinking resulted in progressive leaps in medicine, engineering and technology, these same principles applied to human behavior have contributed to the maturity of employee relationships in the Industrial Revolution. The Grid will continue to be a powerful framework in many areas of this country. The most receptive market will be in developing countries needing the discipline that it offers—as well as the "concern for people" that it promotes.

Likewise, Hersey and Blanchard's approach to Situationalism is full of mechanistic assumptions, especially in their Skinnerian assumptions regarding people and their fascination with the manipulation of the "carrots and sticks" within the managerial and child-rearing contexts. In a real sense, behaviorism represents the culmination of the mechanistic approach in the field of psychology. In this view, living organisms are complex machines reacting, in predictable ways, to external stimuli and, as Capra notes, "This stimulus response mechanism was, of course, modeled after Newtonian physics." These behaviorists, he continued, "studied the entire constellations of stimuli and complex responses, which were referred to respectively as 'situations and adjustments' " and constructed massive approaches to social organizations based on these processes.[10]

At the moment, contingency or situational theory is sweeping over the organizational and motivational field. The histories of many fields show a general movement from universal principles to situational relationships and principles. The situational premise, however, is under attack within our culture in religion, education and social mores. And, while the first assault appears to be from the conservative positions, there is growing evidence that the questioning of situational tenets has a much broader base.

Khandwall notes in his description of modern organizations, "There is something unsatisfactory about contingency theory, a tendency to see unique organizational responses to environmental and technological stimuli. . .by tending to underemphasize, often ignore, the possibility of more than one feasible organizational response to the same task environmental stimulus. This mechanistic flavor of current contingency theorists is alarming."[11]

When viewed through the systemic prism of quantum mechanics inspired physics, managerial/training models, such as the Grid and Situationalism, may need to be supplemented by a new generation of theoretical models that will reflect our new understanding of the nature of the cosmos and the neurological processes within the human brain. These new models will be seen as "living systems."*

Living Systems models attempt to account for all factors within a given situation—personal, social, technical, structural and environmental. These models become interested in how these subsystems affect each other. In this view, both individuals and organizations of any size are the product of a delicate balance of a number of interlocking and interdependent subsystems. A slight change in any of these subsystems will result in a gestalt-like shift in the entire network.

Characteristics of Living Systems

• Living Systems models see organizations as dynamic moving

*J.G. Miller, in *Living systems*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1978, asserts that systems at all levels—cell, organ, organism, group, organization, society and suprana-tional) are open systems composed of subsystems which process inputs, throughputs and outputs of various forms of matter, energy and information.

pictures where the internal and external scenes are constantly changing;

• Living Systems models focus more on the selection and place-ment of people than their "train-ing and development";

• Living Systems emphasize the importance of implementing systems rather than dealing with personality traits or types;

• Living Systems models recognize that the actual work to be done or function to be served should comprise the driving force for determining the appropriate organizational design or motiva-tional strategy;

• Living Systems models ac-cept that change happens natural-ly and that "planning change" is more a manipulative fiction than a practical reality;

• Living Systems models admit there are times and situations in-volving people and nature's flow where there is nothing to do but marvel at the process;

• Living Systems models claim that no two people, organizations, situations or cultures are alike—and that each circumstance is in constant motion along or within maps, landscapes and tapestries.

Two separate but related tributaries feed into the main current of thought that con-tributes to and reinforces the emerging new paradigm in general, and the shaping of the Living Systems model in par-ticular. The first tributary is represented by the explosion of research and theorizing in neurological systems in the brain.* The second is the result of systemic thinking from the more traditional field of social psychology.**

Two recent theoretical formula-tions combine both of these tributaries into more eclectic statements of the responses of the *Homo sapien* species to the problems that have characterized our psychological history. Ken Wilber's "Spectrum Theory of Human Consciousness" represents an attempt to in-

tegrate Western and Eastern philosophical thought into a developmental framework. Each level or band of this spectrum is characterized by a different sense of identity, ranging from the supreme identity of the cosmic consciousness to the drastically narrowed identity of the self. As in any spectrum, the various bands demonstrate infinite shades and gradations, merging gradually from one into another.[12]

Clare W. Graves' "Emergent, Cyclical, Double-Helix Model of Biopsychosocial Development" forms the basis for the theoretical view we have used at the National Values Center since 1974.*** The Gravesian syn-thesis, based on 30 years of in-ductive whole-brained research, asserts that the development of value or coping systems in in-dividuals, organizations or even cultures, is the result of the natural interaction of the pro-blems of existence (as the First Helix) with the mechanisms in the human brain (as the Second Helix) to form what he calls "levels of psychological existence."

These levels are distinct pro-grams within the human brain and are the result of the intermix of chemical and anatomical systems, which appear to be hierarchically ordered. Instead of being types of people or discrete stages in one's passage through life, Graves views these as coex-isting subsystems activated by

the existence problems.

The Gravesian Systemic Model describes how the Double Helix spins through time and space spawning the flora and fauna of value systems, belief structures or mind-sets. Graves has charted eight of these "levels" developed to date, with new systems emerging in the future—if and when we confront new problems or challenges that, once again, redeploy the brain's neurological resources.

Both the Wilber and Graves' sets of assumptions are based on thinking within the natural flow of events and situations. By look-ing through these "living systems" prisms, one can see new approaches to training and development and organizational transformation. Organizations ap-pear to be more like cobwebs than the traditional linear model. Organizational charts look more like "Disney Land maps" than boxed-in switchboards. Change is seen as a process that happens, but no one is powerful enough to cause people to change. Ultimate-ly, each of the bands or levels of existence learn in different ways, respond to different trumpet calls to battle and possess their own sense of religion, politics, management and preferred lifestyle.

The issues surrounding the con-troversy regarding the Managerial Grid and Situational Leadership, consequently, go far beyond the relative strengths or weaknesses of the two systems or the four theorists. When per-ceived against the moving picture screen of the changing paradigms, the issues that divide them appear to be inconsequen-tial. Yet, both systems provide their advocates with views of the cosmos that may fit their par-ticular "situation" or "concerns." They will continue to be relevant and useful when the assumptions within each match the context in-to which they have been applied. But, like "wineskins" that once carried the "new wine" for a generation of training and development practitioners, they, too, will become "old wineskins" and no amount of patching up or improved marketing will equip

*The research and popular literature from science and technology is full of articles or updates on brain theory and applications. Two of the best syntheses of this research, as it relates to training and development functions and managerial thinking, may be found in the "FOURbrain" model developed by Dudley Lynch and Ned Herrmann's "Brain Dominance" model.

**There are a number of interesting systemic models in the research literature ranging from concepts of ego-development by Jane Loevinger to O.J. Harvey's "belief systems" and Lawrence Kohlberg's "levels of moral reasoning."

***Clare W. Graves' systemic model identifies nine "levels of Psychological Existence" with a controlling theme of each subsystem. The Grid is designed to func-tion within the model's Fifth Level mind-set—depicting an interest in "scientific" research and producing "suc-cess" and accomplishment. Situationalism reflects a transition from a materialistic, multiplistic character to that of being relativistic and/or personalistic, with a focus on relativistic or situational thinking processes.

them for the "new wine" that
will come from "grapes already
ripening on the vines."

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