

# A CONTINGENCY FRAMEWORK FOR ENTREPRENEURSHIP DEVELOPMENT

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## INTRODUCTION

Organizational development has been studied over many years in terms of how it takes place and what form the organization takes after such change. When it comes to entrepreneurship, little of this knowledge has translated in terms of professional development. Instead, a one size fits all approach to Entrepreneurship Development Programs (EDPs) is implemented in actual development situations where entrepreneurs are being developed, coached and/or mentored. This paper proposes a first step towards understanding implementation by proposing a working theory of implementation based on a framework borrowed from Political Science literature. The Contingency Model, used in international mediation research, provides a framework that can aid entrepreneurship development professionals and consultants, or what is referred to here as “Change Agents”.

Political Science offers a potentially better approach that goes beyond just customizing entrepreneurship development, usually through assigning a mentor. The contingency model, used in international mediation can teach entrepreneurship development professionals to be change agents, not just through understanding the characteristics the entrepreneur and the Small and Medium Enterprise (SME), but also through understanding their own roles and the effect they have in the development process.

In Political Science literature, the goal of the contingency model is to study mediation efforts of international conflicts, which on the surface does not have any parallels with entrepreneurship development. However, at the heart of any mediation is a transformation initiative, meant to improve the parties involved. Entrepreneurship development is a simplified version of transformation to improve and grow an SME. Both processes start with the people involved.

Mediation has an inherently normative quality in that attempts are meant to produce a change in the situation where it is hoped that the outcomes are positive and beneficial for all those involved. These intentions are paralleled in entrepreneurship development, especially by coaches and mentors. It would go against the very nature of the process to not want to produce positive outcomes for the SME (Schein, 1999; Saabye, Finnestrand & Kristensen, 2024; Suzic et al., 2024).

Three contextual factors in international conflict have parallels in entrepreneurship development: the nature of the disputing parties, the nature of the dispute and the nature of the mediator. In understanding these three concepts, a change agent can better tailor a development process to fit the SME and in so doing increase the likelihood of a successful outcome. Understanding the nature of the disputing parties is parallel to understanding the founder, their values and motivations for the SME. Understanding the nature of the dispute is parallel to understanding the nature of the business itself. Here, understanding how success is defined for the SME and why is important before beginning the development process. Lastly, understanding the nature of the mediator is parallel to understanding the role of the coach/mentor since bringing an outside perspective can be disruptive rather than productive unless the coach or mentor

understands themselves, what they are bringing to the SME and how they bring it. This paper provides basic information on the Contingency Model as it is used in Political Science research before applying the model as a framework for entrepreneurship development. Implications for applying this approach are provided in the discussion.

## Entrepreneurship Development

Entrepreneurship Development Programs play a crucial role in fostering entrepreneurial skills and mindsets essential for economic and social advancement. These programs are designed to equip aspiring entrepreneurs with the necessary tools, knowledge, and support to succeed in their ventures. A significant body of research emphasizes the importance of ED programs in developing entrepreneurial mindsets and skills (Smail et al., 2022; Smail, AlAwad & Abaza, 2024). The literature, however, underscores the importance of structured education, ongoing support, and tailored approaches to address the diverse needs of participants.

Felder, Brent, and Prince (2011) argue that effective ED programs are vital for creating wealth and employment opportunities, especially for vulnerable populations. They advocate for a structured approach to analyzing these programs, which can inform the design and implementation of ED programs to ensure they meet specific economic development goals. Similarly, Valerio, Parton, and Robb (2014) reiterate that ED programs are essential for stimulating entrepreneurial activity across diverse demographics. They highlight the necessity of cultivating mindsets and skills, suggesting that EDPs should focus on structured educational initiatives that promote these attributes effectively (Al-Housani, Koc & Al-Sada, 2023).

Alcorso and L'Orange (2014) further underscore the link between education and entrepreneurial effectiveness, revealing that structured programs enhance essential skills such as managerial and social competencies. This indicates that EDPs must prioritize rich content and innovative teaching methodologies to prepare participants adequately for the entrepreneurial landscape (Choi & Hur, 2020; Smail et al, 2022).

Despite the positive associations between entrepreneurship education and venture success, research indicates that the overall impact of EDPs on business ownership and economic outcomes may be limited. Fairlie, Karlan, and Zinman (2015) found that while certain demographic groups, particularly the unemployed, may experience short-term benefits from entrepreneurship training, the long-term effects on sustained business ownership remain unclear. This suggests a need for EDPs to incorporate ongoing support beyond initial training sessions to enhance their sustainability and effectiveness (Englis & Frederiks, 2024). Mohr and Shelton (2017) emphasize the importance of rigorous evaluations of existing entrepreneurship promotion programs. They argue that understanding the dynamics of various types of entrepreneurship and their respective impacts is crucial for designing effective EDPs that promote sustainable economic development. This calls for a more evidence-based approach as well as a more nuanced understanding of how the EDP is provided.

Li et al. (2020) explore the impact of business incubators as tools for entrepreneurship development, highlighting the mediating role of startup support and government regulations. This suggests that EDPs must align with external factors because maximizing their effectiveness may be contingent upon doing so. Research also indicates the necessity for EDPs to be tailored to address the specific needs of different target groups. Sanyang and Huang (2010) further emphasize the necessity for EDPs to be adaptable and responsive to the unique challenges encountered by participants, ensuring that they can navigate the entrepreneurial landscape effectively (Kapoor, 2019; Aparicio, Audretsch & Urbano, 2021). Edoho (2015) notes the

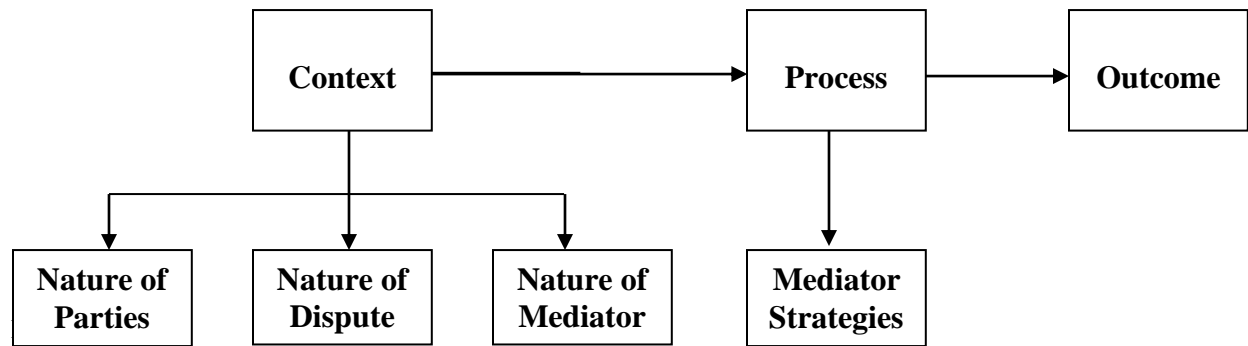
importance of aligning EDPs with broader policy frameworks to create an enabling environment for entrepreneurship, adding to the need for contextual understanding ahead of the ED initiative.

### **The Contingency Model**

The Contingency Model emphasizes understanding the nature of the situation before initiating any change process. For an entrepreneurship development initiative, this idea applies directly for external change agents. Reminiscent of Schein's "Ten Process Principles" (1999), the perspective of an external agent is the focus here as he/she can directly be likened to a mediator in international conflict (Fisher & Keashly, 1991; Bercovitch & Houston, 2000; Albulescu, 2023; Kugler & Colman, 2024). Although a similar contingency theory exists in Organizational Change literature predicated upon the same paradigm, the Contingency Model from Political Science is used here as it not only provides a perspective outside the standard organizational change and management literature but also, rather than being purely a theory of how to view entrepreneurship development initiatives, it is also a model for how to approach them from the onset, giving it an inherently practical aspect.

Studies have been useful in their application of the contingency model to real world settings and discussions have begun to emphasize the sociological characteristics involved in initiatives (Albulescu, 2023; Kugler & Colman, 2024). Traditional theories of political science simplify their examinations of initiatives by ignoring or minimizing the importance of these characteristics, believing that by doing so, the theory can be applied more generally. However, within the past three decades, the characteristics of those involved, as well as those of external mediators, have been taken into account, which has actually allowed for more general application (Holsti, 1987; Bercovitch & Langley, 1993; Engvall & Svensson, 2020; Bohmelt, 2021).

Because of the generality of this model, it has a wide range of applications. It encompasses many of the different influencing factors by creating generalized categories and leaves it up to the researcher to apply the model to specific situations. It is this point that allows for application to management in general and entrepreneurship development specifically. It is important to remember that the Contingency Model is not a theory or a tool for predicting specific outcomes. Rather, it is meant as a guide for the development of research designs and for the generation of theories (Bercovitch & Houston, 2000). Figure 1 below presents the model.



**Figure 1**  
**CONTINGENCY MODEL OF MEDIATION**  
 (Source: Bercovitch and Langley, 1993)

The Contingency Model begins with an analysis of the context. This includes an assessment of two environmental factors: (1) the nature of the dispute and (2) how the parties involved relate to the nature of the dispute (Bercovitch et al., 1991; Jackson, 2000). Some scholars have included a third contextual factor, the “nature” of the mediator, which can add more explanatory power to the model because it incorporates an analysis of the influence of the mediator’s characteristics on the process of mediation (Bercovitch et al., 1991; Bercovitch & Langley, 1993; Kugler & Colman, 2024).

The second part of the model is the process implemented by the change agent. Here, strategies and techniques are analyzed and from these two factors emerges the outcome. Updated models include breaking down each part and adding more detailed groupings to each category (Bercovitch & Houston, 2000; Albulescu, 2023; Kugler & Colman, 2024) or by describing the parts in terms of the conditions they represent, i.e. antecedent conditions, current conditions, consequent conditions (Jackson, 2000), but the general outline of the model remains the same.

In the last step of the model, the actual process used by the mediator, a distinction is made between the behavior of the mediator and the communicative function the mediator performs (Kleiboer, 1996; Hellmuller & Pring, 2020; Hellmuller, 2021). The behavior is the strategy or techniques the mediator uses to bring about the outcome of the mediation effort. The communicative function of a mediator involves relating and interpreting information. The point of the Contingency Model is that these two processes are or should be contingent upon the previous step where the mediator works to understand the context as described above.

### **Application to Entrepreneurship Development**

At the heart of conflict mediation is essentially a change initiative. The idea of mediating a conflict is to change the situation to end the conflict. As such, there can be direct links with the Contingency Model to organizational development initiatives and arguably, the purest form of organizational development is entrepreneurship development since you are developing from the ground up. The Contingency Model prescribes starting with an understanding of the context as it relates to three factors. The first of these contextual factors is a familiarity with the parties involved. What is designated as the Nature of the Disputing Parties in the original model can be translated to the Nature of the entrepreneur or founder. For an entrepreneurship development initiative this means understanding the founder, their values, motivations and desired outcomes

(Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994; Holmes, 2020; Jensen et al., 2022; Smail, AlAwad & Abaza, 2024).

According to Beer, Eisenstat & Spector (1990) the structure and systems within an organization are critical and so advise that these are the last things to be changed. So too are the motivations, values and vision of the founder (Smail, AlAwad & Abaza, 2024). Further, they believe that change initiatives that seek to change the culture of an organization are inherently flawed (Beer et al., 1990). An understanding of the founder and the “culture” they create from the beginning will provide a basic understanding of the situation as it exists at the onset. This is crucial because any process of development that is at odds with this will struggle to succeed at best and fail from the start at worst (Detert et al., 2000).

The second contextual factor is a familiarity with the change being sought. What the model describes as the Nature of the Dispute can be translated as the Needs of the SME or more specifically the Needs of the Founder. It is easy to pin a label on a problem and apply a cookie-cutter solution. However, no two problems are the same because no two SME’s are the same. After understanding the needs, it is important to know success means for the company given that understanding. By defining the issue, and in some cases redefining it as per the situation, with sufficient detail unique to the organization, change agents are better equipped to provide processes for development customized to the needs of the SME.

Beer, Eisenstat and Spector (1990) suggest that one can create energy in an organization by including all stakeholders in defining the development the organization desires. This method allows for greater and more detailed information of what exactly are the organization’s needs and why it needs them. In entrepreneurship development, we know these can often be interchangeable with the founder’s needs. Including all levels will provide a wealth of information not normally available in diagnosing issues. With this information, change agents can better fit the development process to focus on what actually needs to be changed and thus increasing the chance for success.

The last contextual factor is understanding the role of the change agent in the development initiative. What is described as the Nature of the Mediator can translate into the Nature of the Coach or Mentor. This includes two parts; the behavior of the change agent and the communicative function they play within the development process (Saabye, Finnestrand & Kristensen, 2024; Suzic et al., 2024). As an external consultant, it is important to understand that any development initiative can be viewed as an imposed process from outsiders (Schein, 1999; Saabye, Finnestrand & Kristensen, 2024). This can be seen as disruptive so understanding what the change agent’s influence on the SME is can be crucial because every interaction has consequences (Schein, 1999). As such, the two functions a mediator plays in conflict resolution can inform a change agent’s role in a development process. However, while the behavior of a change agent is dependent upon the development process applied, the communicative function may be more important (Hardy et al., 2000; Alvesson & Karreman, 2005).

The change agent should understand what information is communicated and how they communicate it to all levels of the SME so that not only the founder but the whole team and employees understand what is being done, why it is being done and what the importance is for them. Not everyone will understand the same idea in the same way. It is important for the change agent to interpret information in a way that is understandable by all (Phillips & Hardy, 2002). By playing an active role in the development and understanding the influence they have on it, a change agent can facilitate a successful process rather than imposing a preset approach. Figure 2 shows the modified contingency model as it would look for entrepreneurship development.

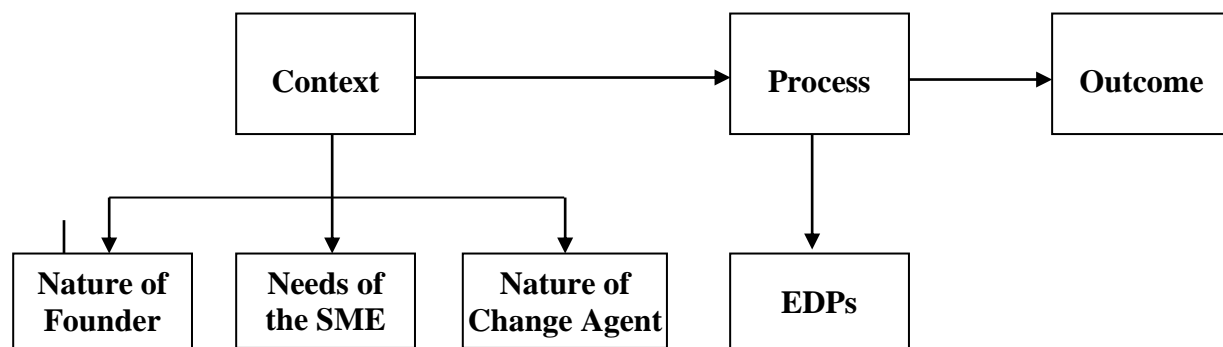


Figure 2

### THE PROPOSED CONTINGENCY MODEL OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP DEVELOPMENT

After the context is understood then ideally the development process will flow from it. Change agents should utilize the information gathered to fit the development process to the founder and SME. This means first employing an initiative that utilizes the existing formal and informal structures of the organization and functions within the organizational, not work against it. They should also keep the goals of the founder at its core so that the process addresses what the SME's needs really are, even if this means that the change agent needs to redefine the problem to get at the true issues. Finally, the change agent's involvement should be facilitated by the change agent in a way that maintains lines of communication and interprets information as needed for all stakeholders. The change agent should do this while being constantly aware of their role and the impact their presence has on the SME.

The change agent's involvement should not merely take into account the context of the SME but rather should develop directly from it. This may mean that the entire initiative requires more time and effort but by working within the SME's context then the chance for success should increase. What is also important is that a feedback system be established while the initiative is in place and outcomes are produced. Since development initiatives can, on some level, change aspects of the SME's context it is important to have those changes link back to the contextual understanding as the process unfolds so that changes can be made to the initiative or negative outcomes can be minimized as they occur. By having a constant feedback system, the entire process can evolve and be malleable enough to account for the development as it occurs. This will only increase the probably for success even more.

### Implications for SME's

The implications of applying the Contingency Model to EDPs are two-fold. First, in an increasingly global business environment, stakeholders for any business extend beyond the borders of the home country. So much so that organizations are not restricted to a single nation but operate in multiple nations and regions, each with unique and differing cultures, attitudes and beliefs on how business should be conducted. As such, the need for a contextual understanding at the beginning of any development initiative is even more important. Just as understanding the diversity of a workforce within a single location, external change agents also need to understand the diversity of operational norms from among several perspectives as these both effect and can be affected by the development initiative. For the same reasons stated above, the nature of the organization and the development initiative must be understood and taken into account when

designing and implementing an EDP. Of more importance is understanding the nature of the change agent since they will not only be entering an organization from the outside but possibly working within culture or context not their own, which can be even more alien, and thus, imposing to an SME (i.e. an American imposing American business ideals in a non-western setting).

Second, with the advent of digitization, the relationship between technology and entrepreneurial activities has evolved, necessitating a critical examination of how technological advancements influence entrepreneurial development. Giones and Brem (2017) highlight the necessity of redefining technology entrepreneurship within the context of digitization. They argue that the socio-economic impacts of digital technology on entrepreneurial activities are profound, suggesting that technology not only creates new opportunities but also poses unique challenges for entrepreneurs. These challenges cannot be addressed without understanding the founder's technological knowledge and need beforehand and further stress the importance of understanding context before process (Giones and Brem, 2017; Sahut et al., 2019).

Furthermore, technology is a critical factor influencing individuals' decisions to pursue entrepreneurship. Technology and other ecosystem elements such as market conditions and government support work hand-in-hand, suggesting that technology can act as both an enabler and a barrier to entrepreneurship. In addition to ecosystem factors, Kamberidou (2020) explores the unique challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in accessing technology and capital, emphasizing the role of social capital in the creative industries. The study points to the necessity of fostering supportive networks and information sharing among women entrepreneurs to enhance their business performance and innovation. Change agents thus have to make an effort to understand the unique challenges facing women founders as applying a male-focused approach can be detrimental (Hayhurst, 2014; Kamberidou, 2020).

Similar to the Contingency Model of conflict mediation, change agents are seen as third-parties and are outsiders in the initiative. Cultural misunderstandings or even violations in the context of mediation can result in the disruption of the mediation process and could negatively impact the conflict by prolonging it further than necessary. In the context of entrepreneurship development, it could undermine the initiative and prolong the underlying issue hindering the achievement of outcomes and success in the first place.

## Future Research

While the literature provides valuable insights into the design and impact of EDPs, several knowledge gaps remain. For instance, there is a need for more comprehensive evaluations that assess the long-term impacts of EDPs on entrepreneurial success and economic development. Future research should focus on longitudinal studies that track the progress of EDP participants over time. However, this type of research must integrate a qualitative approach to better capture the specific context of entrepreneurs. A basic thematic analysis may produce general themes to better support or advise change agents without sacrificing individual, context specific factors among the various entrepreneurs. Additionally, there is limited exploration of the specific pedagogical approaches that are most effective in fostering entrepreneurial skills. Further investigation into the use of experiential learning, project-based learning, and the incorporation of real-world challenges into EDPs could yield valuable insights.

Further research recommendations include a need for a deeper understanding of how different types of technology specifically impact various entrepreneurs based on the nature of the founder, the needs of the SME, the cultural influences on the founder and the various sectors of

entrepreneurship. Additionally, the role of emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence and blockchain, in shaping entrepreneurial practices warrants further exploration. Future research should also focus on longitudinal studies that track the evolution of technology entrepreneurship over time, particularly in response to global crises.

Finally, more research is needed on the intersection of technology, social capital, and gender in entrepreneurship, especially in underrepresented communities. Understanding how to effectively bridge technological gaps for marginalized groups can promote inclusivity in entrepreneurial activities and better prescribe frameworks that align with the Contingency Model for change agents to contribute to the development of SME's as well as design larger EDPs more effectively.

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