

Path-Goal Theory of Leadership

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Path-goal theory is designed to explain “how leaders motivate followers to be productive and satisfied with their work. It is a contingency approach to leadership because effectiveness depends on the fit between the leader’s behavior and the characteristics of followers and the task (Northouse, 2016, p. 135).” Path-goal theory “emphasizes the relationship between the leader’s style and the characteristics of the followers and the organizational setting (Northouse, 2016, p. 115).” “In brief, path-goal theory is designed to explain how leaders can help followers along the path to their goals by selecting specific behaviors that are best suited to followers’ needs and to the situation in which followers are working. By choosing the appropriate style, leaders increase followers’ expectations for success and satisfaction (Northouse, 2016, p. 116).”

The underlying assumption of expectancy theory is (Murphy, 2016):

that followers will be motivated if they are capable of performing their work, if they believe their efforts will result in a certain outcome, and if they believe that the payoffs for doing their work are worthwhile. This undergirds the path-goal theory because a leader can use the expectancy theory to find out what is rewarding to the followers about their work and then make those rewards available to them when they accomplish the requirements of their work. In this way, the leader can use the expectancy theory to push everyone towards the goal.

“In simple terms, it is the leader’s responsibility to help followers reach their goals by directing, guiding, and coaching them along the way (Northouse, 2016, p. 135).”

This path-goal theory poses a challenge for the leader with four criticisms (Northouse, 2016, p. 135):

1. The scope of path-goal theory encompasses so many interrelated sets of assumptions that it is hard to use this theory in a given organizational setting.
2. Research findings to date do not support a full and consistent picture of the claims of the theory.
3. Path-goal theory does not show in a clear way how leader behaviors directly affect follower motivation levels.
4. Path-goal theory is very leader oriented and fails to recognize the interactional nature of leadership. It does not promote follower involvement in the leadership process.

After completing the Path-Goal Leadership Questionnaire and reversing scores for four of the numbers, the style I tend to rely on most is the directive style with a score of 30.

The directive path-goal clarifying behavior of leadership aims to reduce job function ambiguity. Here, a leader gives specific expectations to workers regarding task performance. Work functions are clarified for subordinates to provide a high degree of certainty regarding policies, rules and procedures. Job schedules and coordination of work are clarified. The relationship between performance goals and rewards, such as advancement and pay increases, is also defined to avoid confusion (Cross).

Two and three points less, I closely followed by supportive leadership with a score of 28, and achievement-oriented leadership with a score of 27 (Northouse, 2016, pp. 133-134). The style I tend to rely on least is participative leadership, I scored 19.

An experience I have had showing how my behavior in one situation illustrated my most common leadership style, directive leadership, is when I opened a restaurant and teaching kitchen. I typed up a detailed binder of how to open and close the restaurant. How to clean, take

inventory, and keep the restaurant during hours it was open. How to prep, wash and store food. Employees had detailed job descriptions for everyone to know what their priorities were and what to do when there was down time. Each employee had a detailed list of what was expected of them, how it was to be done, the timeline for when it should be completed. Rules and regulations of the restaurant and employees were clear and detailed. Whenever an employee would ask a question in regards to a situation that was not described in detail in the binder, I would update the binder to include the employee's questions. There was never a wrong question to ask, I felt that if the question was important enough for the employee to ask, then it is important enough to update the instruction binder. This binder worked well for the employees, they did not feel like they were in the dark about questions or what to do. The instructional binder was born out of the strict rules and regulations of the health department. As a restaurant owner, I had to follow a list of rules or my restaurant would be closed, therefore it was important to me as a restaurant owner the employees were aware of the rules, regulations, and consequences of not following the rules. The binder was very clear of the standards and regulations to follow which shows how my behavior illustrates my most common leadership style, directive leadership (Northouse, 2016, p. 117). Working in a restaurant environment is uncertain every second – you don't know who will walk in at any given time, how many people, or if any at all. The uncertainty of day-to-day employment in a restaurant begs to have a detailed description of who, what, when, and why of rules, regulations, schedules, job descriptions, and expectations for employees/followers. My followers were dogmatic and authoritarian and had to work in uncertain situations, therefore, directive leadership, specifically the detailed binder, provided psychological structure and task clarity per the suggestion of path-goal theory (Northouse, 2016, p. 119).

## References

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