

Path-Goal Theory

Path-goal theory explains how leaders can help subordinates along the path to their goals by selecting specific behaviors that are best suited to subordinates' needs and to the situation in which subordinates are working. The theory emphasizes leader's behavior, subordinate's characteristics and type of tasks. According to the theory a leader can be directive, supportive, participative and achievement oriented (Nothouse, 2013).

The path-goal questionnaire is used to measure and learn about where a leader falls among the four types of leadership styles. After finishing the questionnaire, I was surprised to learn that I scored high on each of the four types of leadership styles. I scored a 31 in directive style, a 34 in supportive style, a 33 in participative style and a 30 in achievement-oriented style. Not only was I surprised to score highly in each of these styles, I also found it interesting to see that each of the four scores were very close to each other.

Although I was initially surprised to score highly in each of the four styles, when I thought about it, these scores do make sense. This is because I tend to be quite adaptable in how I relate to others. So I can adapt my leadership style to the characteristics of my subordinates, the things that they are looking for or require in a good leader and in the characteristics of the task at hand as well. This seems to fit into the Path-goal theory where a leadership style is directed to the needs of the work environment. For example, sometimes a subordinate worker may lack certain things or tools that they need to succeed. Some employees for example, need more direction, while others may need more nurturing or for their leader to build up their confidence and motivation. I feel that as my scores reflect, I can adapt my leadership style to the needs of my subordinates and their work tasks. I can be supportive and nurturing with some people while

being more directive and task oriented with others. As a leader, I can easily change between being a directive style leader when that fits the needs of the environment or a supportive style leader when a subordinate requires more nurturing and support. I can also be participative or achievement oriented if that is the style that is required. As an effective leader, I feel that it is important to adopt the leadership style that is most necessary to attend to the needs of my subordinates. Each type of leadership style that I can adopt has a different kind of impact on my subordinate's motivation. A good style is one that complements or supplements what is missing in the work environment (Northouse, 2013). I also would like to help my subordinates to define their goals as well as to identify the path that they need to take to achieve those goals. Moreover, when obstacles arise, it is important for me to help subordinates to confront these obstacles and to determine their best method for overcoming them.

Although the scores in the Path-goal questionnaire lead me to believe that I am high scoring in each of the four leadership styles, I feel that the Path-goal theory lacks information on how to effectively implement each leadership style. I also wonder about the effectiveness of Path-goal theory on a subordinate that I know very well versus one who is new or who I haven't had time to get to know. I think that if I know an employee very well, I can better apply the leadership style that is best for them. Also, some subordinates may have needs that fall under more than one leadership style. I am not sure in this type of case how to determine which type of leadership style would be most applicable in this type of situation. An additional drawback of Path-goal theory is that it can lead subordinates to become too dependent on their leader (Northouse, 2013). In my opinion the danger of this is that if a subordinate becomes too dependent on their leader, they may not be able to grow professionally to the most of their

potential and may not ever develop the critical thinking and decision making skills that could benefit them in their career.

In conclusion, although I do agree with the high scores I earned in each of the four leadership styles, I would like to learn more about how I can apply this knowledge in specific situations to help my subordinates to feel more competent and motivated to perform well and to the best of their ability.

Reference:

Northouse, P. G. (2013). *Leadership: Theory and practice* (6th ed.)