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Chapter 6 – Path-Goal Theory

Questions for Study

1. What researchers are most associated with path-goal theory?
Evans, House, Dessler and Mitchell.
2. What are the assumptions of expectancy theory and how do they undergird path-goal theory?
The underlying assumption of expectancy theory is that followers will be motivated if they think they are capable of performing their work.
3. Explain each of the four leader behaviors considered in path-goal theory.
There is directive leadership which is similar to the “initiating structure” concept described in the Ohio state studies as well as the “telling styles” described in Situational Leadership. The Second type is Supportive leadership which resembles the consideration behavior construct identified by the Ohio State studies. The third type is Participative Leadership which consist of inviting followers to share in the discussion making. The fourth is the “Achievement Oriented Leadership” which is characterized by a leader who challenges followers to perform at the highest level.
4. Identify the follower characteristics that influence how workers interpret a leader’s behavior.
The researchers have focused on the followers needs for affiliation, preference for structure, desires for control, and self-perceived level of task ability.
5. How does each follower characteristic affect that interpretation?
Those who have a strong need for affiliation prefer supportive leadership because friendly and concerned leadership is a source of satisfaction. Directive leadership provides those who need structure the best type of leadership due to the clarifying of a goal. Followers who have high desire for control react best to participation leadership where as those with a low desire need more of a direct approach. And finally as followers perceive their own abilities the need for directive leadership goes down substantially.
6. Identify the task characteristics that influence how workers interpret a leader’s behavior.
If a task seems to be too lofty the workers could be intimidated or their performance could be inhibited due to the tasks overall weightiness.
7. How does each task characteristic affect how the leader’s behavior influences motivation?
The different task characteristics impact the behavior of the individuals because path-goal theory involves the leader assessing the situation and then passing out assignments to the individuals based on their abilities.
8. Explain the conditions under which each of the four leadership styles is optimally used.
In theory directive approaches should be used when the followers are dogmatic and authoritarian, and when the task is ambiguous unclear and complex. The supportive approach should be used when the followers are unsatisfied, needing attention, and human touch with the task being repetitive, unchallenging, and mundane. The Participative approach should be used when the followers are autonomous, needing of control, and clarity, and the situation should be ambiguous unclear and unconstructed. Finally, a leader should use an achievement

oriented approach when there are high expectations and a need to excel when the task is ambiguous challenging and complex.

9. What are strengths of path-goal theory?

Strengths of the path goal include the ability to provide a useful theoretical framework to understand how leadership behavior impacts follower's satisfaction and work performance. It attempts to integrate motivation principles of expectancy theory into leadership, and a third would be the fact path goal theory provides a model that in a certain way is very practical.

10. What are criticisms of path-goal theory?

Some criticisms would be that it is very complex, and incorporates so many different aspects of leadership that it can be confusing, a second would be it is only partially supported among research studies, it fails to explain adequately the relationship between leadership behavior and follower motivation and a final criticism is that the theory concerns a practical outcome of the theory.

11. How does path-goal theory fit with the four components of leadership (process, influence, groups, common goals)?

Path goal leadership shows a process because it allows a leader to see the development of a situation and act accordingly to it. It allows for the assessment of the situation to develop into a proper channel of guidance and influence in the follower's life. Path goal leadership also allows for the groups to work coherently because they are able to be lead in the proper manner according to the situation and the groups needs to achieve the common goal between them.