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Path-Goal Theory and the Application in Educational Management and Leadership

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Abstract

This study focuses on Path-Goal theory and application in educational management and leadership, which is categorized under contingency approach of leadership. The theory proposed that the behaviour of leaders' can be exercised through different approaches, times, and situations by the same leader. The purpose of this paper is to highlight path-goal leadership theory. An important aspect of this paper hinges on the application of path-goal theory in an educational institution using leadership approaches in terms of supportive, directive, achievement-oriented, and participative behaviour on subordinate in achieving task completion. It is concluded that education leaders should put in use the path-goal leadership approaches in their daily dealings with their subordinate in their various educational institution.

Keywords: Achievement Oriented, Directive, Leadership, Path-Goal Theory, Participative

Introduction

Leaders' competences are arguably key factor for establishing a successful educational institution in a competitive society. Thus, while enhancing leaders' ability to understand the internal and external dynamism of working environments, this is critical to the need of improving the competitiveness of the leaders, including their ways of thinking and how they do things. Leadership is discovered to be a very significant part in building an effective and successful educational institution. Due to the past complex challenges, education leaders should be able to act differently according to the societal demands (Sakiru, D'Silva, Othman, DaudSilong & Busayo, 2013). Leadership is posited on how a leader influences, encourages and leads the subordinates to contribute towards the effectiveness and success of the organisation of which they are member (McShane & Glinow, 2010). Leadership is more to a process where it influence motivates others to work for the institutional objectives. Hence, it is crucial for education managers and supervisors to know how to motivate their subordinates in achieving the stated goals (Malik, 2012). Leadership has significant influences on employees' working performance. Voon, Lo, Ngui, and Ayob (2011) revealed that a capable leader will provides direction for an institution and assists subordinate in accomplishing desired objectives. Effective leadership approach stands to control the subordinate behaviour towards their working input and output as well as influence their general

performance in task completion (Nwibere, 2013). In this context, there are various studies on leadership that have been conducted and found leadership to be significantly positive and important in the prediction of employee attitudes, motivation, and performance in an institution (Kelloway, Turner, Barling & Loughlin, 2012).

Kozak and Uca (2008) found that leadership style can improve positive relationships with employees, enhance service performance, and also assist in organizational climate improvement. Moreover, it can also be viewed as vital management tool. Essentially, practicing good leadership enhances job satisfaction, reduces absenteeism at work, and promote individual efficiency. However, path-goal theory proposes that when leaders employ behaviour that eliminates deficiencies and is instrumental to subordinate satisfaction, as well as individual working performance, it is likely to increase the satisfaction of their followers (House, 1996). Leaders who possess good leadership qualities will act as a role model to the employees, promote equality among staff, and plan towards development of the institution (Kamisan & King, 2013).

Conversely, according to Wen (2014), the ability of leaders to learn faster than their institutional standard stands as the only sustainable competitive advantage. Thus, it is leaders' responsibility to enhance the competitiveness of their institutions and their ability to compete in the competitive advance society. Basically, competences is defined as the extent to which leaders are willing to improve their personal leadership skills and knowledge to cover the gap between their current leadership competences and required ones. Education leaders should be able to face challenges accompanying developing process of their institutions (Word, Bacon, Mackie, 2003). In this process, the role of leadership is very important, and it can affect the input and output of their institutions, programmes, and employees. Effective leadership must be able to motivate their subordinates to do their best and exploit all their potentials in contributing to development of the institutions, as well as to achieve job satisfaction among the employees. Different leadership and management strategies should be employed to achieve and ensure job satisfaction based on different situations (Dixon & Hart, 2010). Employee's motivation and achieving job satisfaction are very essential to enhance the institutional competitiveness (Yeo, 2006). The objective of this paper is to conceptually highlight path-goal leadership theory and the application of path-goal leadership theory in an educational institution using leadership behaviour on subordinate in following dimensions such as supportive, directive, achievement-oriented, and participative behaviour.

Path-Goal Theory

Path-goal theory states that leaders have to adjust their leadership style based on the characteristics of followers and type of tasks that need to be completed. Path-goal theory attempts to increase the motivation and happiness of the followers in each situation (Northouse, 2016). A leader will increase the motivation and job satisfaction of followers by adding value to follower needs, while also making the goal clear to all followers. According to path-goal theory, a leader also needs to provide rewards to increase motivation and satisfaction. It is the responsibility of the leader in line with path-goal theory, to guide followers to completion of task using proper behaviours to increase motivation (Northouse 2016). Path-goal theory focuses on leadership behaviour, which is seen as source of influence that can change the attitude, motivation, and behaviour of subordinate (Malik et al., 2014). Path-goal leadership theory requires educational leaders, who are interested in spreading learning culture to adopt any of directive, supportive, participative, and achievement-oriented leadership behaviour. Certainly, leaders can adopt one of these leadership behaviours to achieve the goal of influencing subordinates' knowledge and experiences. Moreover, the adoption of appropriate approach is required to respond quickly to subordinates' expectations, needs, and wants.

According to DeCaro (2005), the adoption of appropriate behaviour depends on the change in situational factors like institutional culture, task uncertainty, and subordinates' characteristics. This suggests that educational leaders can adopt any of path-goal leadership approaches to motivate subordinates to fill learning gap and improve their learning abilities. The assumption of path-goal leadership theory by educational leaders allows influencing subordinates' attitudes through clarifying the path, removing obstacles, and allowing the goal of improvement to be achieved in the educational institution. The adoption of appropriate approaches will aid subordinates to satisfy their needs, and accomplished stated goals. According to DeCaro (2005), path-goal theory

emphases on leaders influencing subordinates' perceptions of their working objectives, personal goals, and paths toward goal attainment.

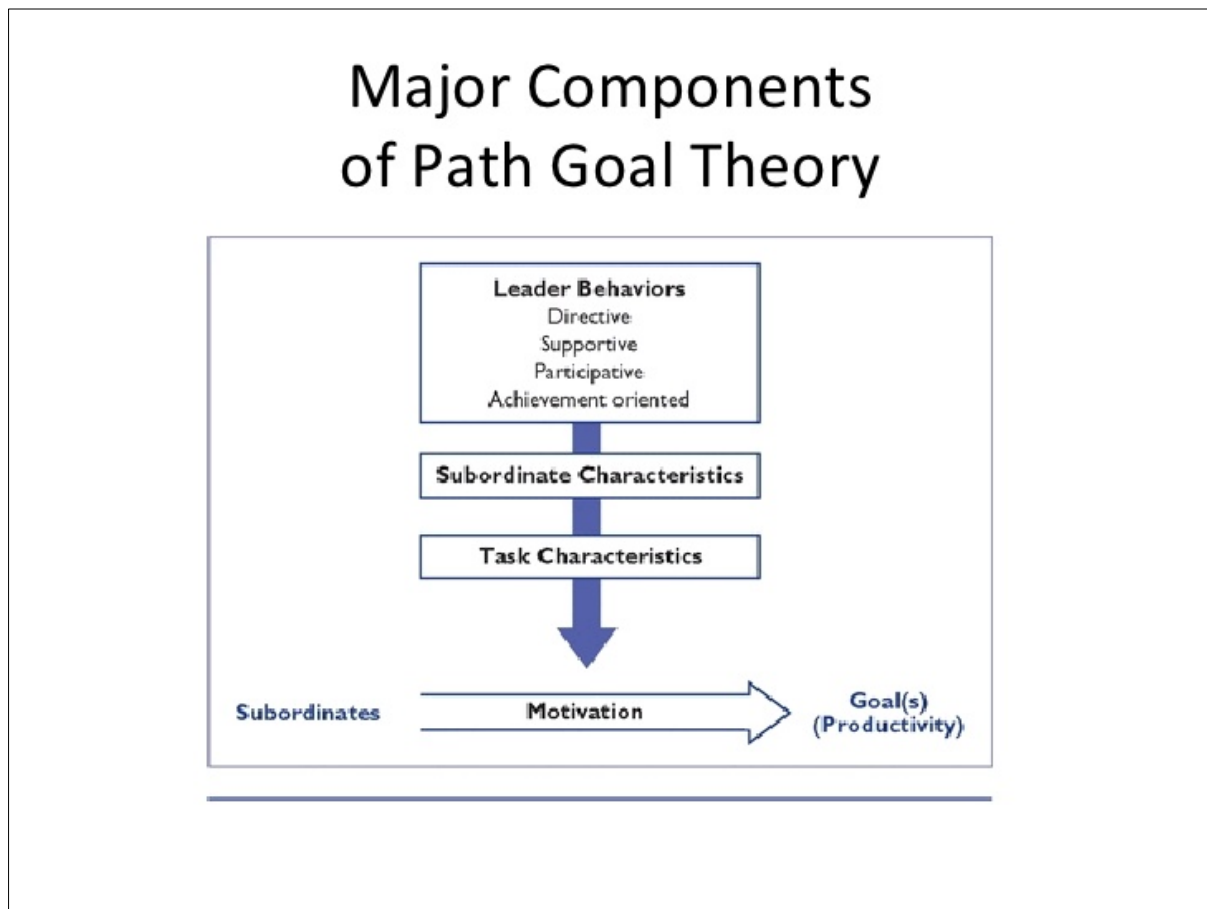Figure 1.1: The Basic Idea of Path-Goal Theory

Source: Authors' construct based on Northouse (2007).

The illustrations above according to House and Mitchell (1974) cited in Northouse (2007) posited that leaders motivate their subordinates by removing obstacles from the path to success, as well as coaching and leading them to complete their tasks and achieve their goal.

Application of Path-Goal Theory

The interaction between leaders, subordinates, and institutional culture are essential to improve subordinates' skills and working knowledge. Similarly, the groundwork of path-goal theory was originally by House (1971) who focused on studying effect of leaders' behaviours such as supportive, directive, achievement-oriented, and participative behaviour on subordinates' motivation and performance at work. According to the theory, effectiveness of leadership depends on the behaviour of a leader through satisfaction of subordinates' performance. House (1971) further stressed that effects of leadership behaviour on subordinates' motivation and satisfaction are contingent in which each of the behaviours are likely to be effective or ineffective. Dixon and Hart (2010) posited path-goal theory as such flexible behaviours like clarification, direction, structure, and rewards. Conferring to the theory, adoption of path-goal leadership behaviour conferred leaders to "clarify and provide directions for followers, help remove obstacles, provide encouragement and rewards for goal achievement" (Dixon & Hart, 2010). Considering submissions of path-goal theory, this study argues that leaders act as facilitators, and adopt different behaviours to motivate subordinates towards success by removing obstacles and adopting an effective leadership behaviour. As mentioned above, this study adopted path-goal leadership behaviours for leaders' and their subordinates in educational institution as depicted below.

Figure 1.2: Major Components of Path-Goal Theory

 Source: Authors' construct based on Northouse (2007).

Illustrations above demonstrated main items of path-goal theory, which consist of behaviours of the leader, subordinate characteristics, task characteristics, as well as motivation. Path-goal theory proposes that every leader's behaviour has different influence on subordinates' motivation. The effectiveness of leader's motivation towards their subordinates is depends on subordinates as well as task characteristics (Northouse, 2007).

In this context, path-goal theory helps to identify outcome of leadership approach toward group cohesiveness (Aris & Kamarudin 2009). It is also used to define employees' loyalty to their leader based on leadership approaches (Polston-Murdoch, 2013). Besides, path-goal theory also helps to recognize the result of interaction among leadership approach and turnover intention (Dixon & Hart, 2010). According to House (1971), Path-goal leadership theory aims to clarify the practice of how leaders are able to assist their followers along the path to their objectives (as cited in Fukushige & Spicer, 2011). This theory includes four different approaches of leadership behaviour, which were directive, supportive, participative, and achievement-oriented leadership. According to Malik (2012), directive leadership provides psychological structure for employees. While supportive leadership is based on employees' satisfaction. Whereas participative leadership is when leader encourages employee to participate in decision making. While achievement-oriented leadership is the leadership behaviour that sets clear and achievable target or goal for employee to achieve. The four leadership behavioural approaches are fully discussed below.

Participative Leadership Approach

Participative approach is proposed as an approach for progressive movement of leaders within an educational institution. Participative behaviour is leaders' appreciation of their subordinates' suggestions and opinions. Participative approach was also explained by Linski (2014) who posited that employees at all levels are

encouraged to contribute ideas towards identifying and setting institutional goals, problem-solving, and other decisions that may directly affect them. This could be achieve by encouraging information and communication flow between leaders and subordinates at all levels. Additionally, using participation as an approach successfully requires subordinates to understand the purpose, benefits of sharing their working task and its effect on their institutions. The use of this approach by education leaders will encourage subordinates' inputs and feedback regardless of their position, rank, and interpersonal relationship. Ford (2006) claimed that participative approach promote open communication, which encourage power-sharing that enable both the leaders and subordinates to overcome challenges in their institutions. The participative leadership approach consented to sharing leadership and responsibilities among subordinates (Nahavandi, 2014). Meanwhile, Ford (2006) stressed that allowing subordinates to participate in decision making at work might enhance their satisfaction level, which might lead to performance enhancement. An Empirical study by Sarti (2014) has supported this statement and concluded that the adoption of participative approach has a positive effect on subordinates' satisfaction and performance. The application of this theory in educational institution is for education leaders to adopt participative leadership approach and geared it towards encouraging innovation and creativity through collection of new ideas, suggestions, and proffering solutions for institutional effectiveness.

Supportive Leadership Approach

Supportive leadership approach is an emotional support for subordinates. Supportive leaders show concern for employees' wellbeing and individual desires. Supportive leaders' normally postulated friendly behaviour, approachable as well as attend to the comfort and personal needs of the followers (Northhouse, 2016). Therefore, this leadership approach is adequate in situation where formal authority is weak, and subordinate lacks job satisfaction (Lussier & Achua, 2010). Supportive leaders' encourage friendly attitude by responding to subordinates needs. Empirically, research conducted by Rafferty and Griffin (2006) laid credence on supportive leadership approach with high preferences for followers' needs when making decisions. They also added that adopting supportive leadership behaviour has positive effect on subordinate job satisfaction at workplace. Jaramillo and Mulki (2008) conducted a study to examine how supportive leadership influences the effort of employees through mediator, which includes intrinsic motivation and self-efficacy that will directly influences their job performance. 572 survey packages that consist of questionnaire, letter signed by researchers and postage-paid envelope were posted to employees from large multinational institution in North America. The data collected from the survey were tested with regression analysis. The results of the research indicated that supportive leadership has significant influence on effort of employees, whereas their effort has positive relationship with job performance.

Moreso, Wendt, Euwema, and van Emmerik (2009) have examined the relationship between directive and supportive leadership and workgroup cohesiveness which apply in different social culture. The data was retrieved from a database where data were collected from 29,868 managers and 138,270 relevant team members in 80 countries. Hypotheses were tested with multilevel analysis and result revealed supportive leadership to be positive and show influences on team cohesiveness, whereby team cohesiveness will strongly enhance individual performance. Likewise, Lee and Ahmad (2009) investigated the association between moderating effect of organizational culture on leadership behaviour; organizational commitment as well job satisfaction and work performance. The leadership behaviours are directive, participative, and supportive. A total of 400 questionnaires were distributed through email and personally-administered to the part-time students and the working peers of researchers in University. The data were tested using correlation analyses and hierarchical multiple regression. The findings revealed that the leader's supportive behaviour was related to organizational commitment and job satisfaction. However, it has no relationship with employee performance, but supportive culture shows impacts on organizational commitment and job satisfaction.

The application of this theory in educational institution is for education leaders to motivate their subordinates through building strong emotional bond with them, supporting their working attitude, and improving trust relationship with them. This supportive approach can also increase subordinates' self-confidence in completing a given task. The use of supportive approach by education leaders' might reduce conflicts, dissatisfaction, and stress among subordinates.

Directive Leadership Approach

Northouse (2007) posited directive leadership approach as leaders' expectations regarding the subordinates' outcomes on a given task, directions, and instructions. The leader using directive approach will assigns precisely the task for subordinates and how the task should be completed. Besides that, he or she will explain the ways to complete the task and task schedules to subordinates. The leader will also provide performance standards and sets clear rules and regulations as well as provides explicit expectations of performance for subordinates (Northouse, 2016). Directive leadership behaviour is suitable when task assigned is complex or ambiguous, formal authority is strong, and the subordinates are satisfied with their current job (Lussier & Achua, 2010). This approach can be used when subordinates do not understand the working task and the process of achieving the task. Education leaders' can respond to subordinates needs through directive leadership approach by motivating subordinate through explaining the goal and procedures of the task, providing structures, and setting the standards they should follow to achieve the task completion. In supporting this, Belás (2013) found that the directive leadership approach is preferred by many managers and has been adopted regardless of its effect on subordinates' level of satisfaction and their performance. The application of this theory in educational institution is geared towards education leaders to use this approach in encouraging their subordinates working abilities through planning and organizing staff development activities in their various educational institutions.

Achievement-Oriented Leadership Approach

Achievement-oriented leadership approach provides understandable and challenging targets for followers. This leadership approach establishes high quality of target for followers and continue to seek for improvement (Northouse, 2007). Furthermore, the leader demonstrates high level of confidence towards followers (Northouse, 2016). Hence, achievement-oriented leadership is suitable when followers have external locus of control, when autocratic leadership is being accepted, and when their ability is high (Lussier & Achua, 2010). Northouse (2007) explained achievement-oriented approach as leaders' confidence regarding their subordinates' performance and excellent achievement. Empirically, Malik (2013) conducted a research to find out the relationship of path-goal leadership behaviours with employees' job satisfaction in Pakistan. There are four path-goal leadership behaviours, which are directive, supportive, participative, and achievement oriented. 200 questionnaires were distributed to middle, and first line managers and 165 questionnaires were returned. Data analyses were conducted using Pearson correlation analysis, linear regression, and multiple regression analysis in the statistical package for the Social Science (SPSS 16). The finding revealed path-goal leadership behaviours to have influenced employee job satisfaction, and the leader could enhance employee performance by choosing the right behaviour in accordance with the characteristics of followers along with their working environment. Ogbeide (2011) conducted a study to identify the leadership approach by examining the impact of supportive, directive, participative, and achievement-oriented leadership approaches on motivation of employees for work effectiveness that will enhance organizational performance. 273 employees from a public comprehensive university in the Midwestern part of United States were chosen to fill up the questionnaires. Hypotheses were tested with multiple regression analysis, and results showed that employees' motivation for work effectiveness has positively impacted on supportive leadership approach.

The application of this theory is that achievement-oriented leadership as an approach that can be used by education leaders' in the case of challenging subordinate activity in goal achievement. Leaders who want to achieve their challenge goals usually have high expectations and set high standards for subordinates. Leaders will motivate subordinates by sharing responsibility, removing obstacles, and pushing for achievement in the institution. In the case of existence of substantial pressure in the work environment, job satisfaction should be provided to the subordinates by the achievement-oriented leader in order to achieve effective performance. Education leaders' should be more supportive, especially if the institution system is clear and rigid. Based on the theory, clear path to goals of subordinate working task will be achieve through highly structured institution with role and clarity of task. Lastly, the leader should be interested in good working relationship with subordinates, supports their working morale, and decrease the task boredom.

Merits of Path-Goal Theory

The four main leader behaviors addressed in path-goal theory are directive, supportive, participative, and achievement oriented. Directive leadership behaviors include giving instructions about how job duties need to be completed, informing employees when the job needs to be completed and making performance expectations clear to all employees. Supportive leadership behaviors include showing compassion and concern for followers. Supportive leaders attempted to make tasks enjoyable and treat employees as they desire to be treated. Participative leadership behaviors include requesting insight from employees and using the suggestions of employees in the completion of job duties. Achievement-oriented leadership behaviors include behaviors where a leader instills high achievement goals and motivates employees to reach these goals consistently. A leader can exhibit more than one leadership behavior while interacting with followers.

The characteristics of subordinate and characteristics of tasks are just as important in path-goal theory as the behaviors of leaders are. Path-goal theory has focused on need for affiliation, preference for structure, desire for control, and self-perceived task ability. Task characteristics include design of the task, organizational hierarchal structure, and workgroup of subordinate. It is important for leaders to adjust their leadership behaviors based on characteristics of their subordinate and task that needs to be completed. Directive behaviors are preferable when subordinate need structure and are doing complicated task. Supportive behaviors are best when subordinate need to be treated well, and task is simple or difficult to them. Participative behaviors are best when subordinate need clear guidance to complete a task in different ways. Achievement oriented behaviors are preferable when subordinate want to do well, and task is difficult. Path-goal theory is the only leadership approach that employ leaders to recognize that there is need to motivate subordinate appropriately to get a task completed.

Conclusion

Path-goal theory is the common theoretical evolution from contingency theory to research in field of leadership, and this originated from the framework on prediction on motivation theory and main contributors to the recent theory development. The study explained behaviour of leaders' effect on subordinate' job satisfaction, motivation, and performance at work. The theory proposed that behaviour of leaders will be exercised in different circumstances and periods by the same leader. There are many evidence of empirical studies conducted which laid credence to path-goal theory with positive effect between education leaders' and their subordinate at workplace. Application of this theory might be a viable solution to leadership and subordinate challenges in the educational institution, respectively.

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