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A Path-Goal Theory of Leader Effectiveness

Robert House, Administrative Science Quarterly, 1971

Why the best leaders change their style to suit the person and the situation.

The big idea

House argued that a leader's job is to help people reach their goals: make the path clearer, clear the obstacles out of the way, and make the reward worth the effort. There's no single right style. What works depends on the person and the task in front of them.

The famous example

House saw the leader's role as three jobs.

CLARIFY
The path
Make it clear what's needed

REMOVE
Obstacles
Get things out of the way

INCREASE
The payoff
Make the goal worth it

House later developed the theory into four leadership styles: directive, supportive, participative and achievement-oriented.

Why it matters

A maverick talent like Dennis Rodman needs a very different kind of leadership to a young player finding their feet. Treat them the same and you'll lose one of them.

Featured in
The Dennis Rodman Problem

Read the original
House, R. J. (1971). A Path-Goal Theory of Leader Effectiveness. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 16(3), 321–339.

The Strategic Times
Summary by The Strategic Times
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