Does It Matter When Your Team Leader Comes from and Resides in Another Country?

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Abstract

Implicit leadership theories (people's vision of good and bad leaders and leadership) can cause problems in teams of employees with different cultural background, especially when team leader comes from and resides in another country which is often the case in supranational organizations. An identity-based approach to leadership states that the leader must create an intragroup identity that can be hard to achieve as physical distance can inhibit the emergence of a sense of belonging. Using online survey of employees of an international banking organization (n=138) we aimed to clarify (a) whether belonging to a local or international team make a difference regarding expectations on leader and leadership; (b) does working in an international team influence whether an employee prefers a leader from the same or a different country; (c) is the sense of belonging lower in the international teams compared to local ones; (d) is identity leadership connected to the quality of leader-member exchange (LMX)? We found that all employees agree that an effective leader should combine transformational and transactional leadership style. Both international and local team members value dedication dimension of implicit leadership, but local teams consider the sensitivity dimension of implicit leadership to be the most important characteristic of an effective leader. International teams valued more intelligence dimension of implicit leadership. Preferences regarding the country of origin of the leader also differ between groups indicating that identity leadership is associated with physical distance. Lower ratings of identity leadership were caused by a lack of face-to-face interaction in the workplace and dual identity was related to lower ratings for work culture and for a leader from abroad. At the same time, colleagues from another country are seen as part of a cohesive collective, and LMX was not connected to physical distancing.

Keywords: intragroup identity; implicit leadership; local vs international teams; LMX; supranational organisations