

Romance of leadership and management decision making

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Abstract

Many studies have shown that romance of leadership as an implicit leadership theory has an impact on the perception and evaluation of leadership. In this article we argue that romance of leadership also influences top leaders' behavior in terms of decision making. We assume that people with high scores in romance of leadership rely more on the project leader's characteristics than on situational conditions when they have to decide to approve a project or not. In our study 145 clerical workers had to make several managerial decisions in an experimental simulation. We systematically varied three factors: the probability of success of the leader (high vs. low), the probability of success in the given situation (high vs. low) and the leader's behavior in the past (ethical vs. unethical). Results show that participants with a high romance of leadership have a tendency to approve a project if the leader's probability of success is high, and to reject a project if the leader's probability of success is low. "Romanticizers" also approve projects to a greater extent in mixed situations where the leader's probability of success is high and the situation is more unfavorable than in reversed situations. Interestingly, the effects of romance of leadership did not hold for situations where the participants had information about unethical behavior of the project leader. Implications of romance of leadership for managerial and political practice indicate that decisions may be more risky when situational information is neglected and only information about the project leader is taken as being relevant.