

### Ioanna Dimitrakaki



Abstract: The concept of leadership is perhaps the most overused word, which has been harnessed with so many conceptual meanings, stakes and implications. In various scientific articles, it has been understood as a structural characteristic of personality, while it has also been linked to the organisational conditions of the organisation. Often, it has been approached as a behavioral characteristic. Given the proven research value of the concept of leadership, a deeper understanding of its nature can be fundamental. Leadership has been defined as a process of exercising social influence within an organisation or group. In the same context, a leading individual (leader) will tend to initiate invisible and overt processes, where other individuals may be supported in starting and completing tasks. According to the above approach, a leader does not simply plan on the safe side; instead, they lead by taking a significant, ongoing risk of achieving overall goals or approaching total failure. Servant leadership can be a highly effective leadership philosophy for navigating the complex conditions of the modern environment. This was explored in the current paper through the analysis of the global success of the Starbucks café chain.

Keywords: Leadership, Servant leadership, Starbucks, Culture, World Economies, Comparative Advantage.

#### I. INTRODUCTION

"A great leader must first see himself as a servant" – Robert K. Greenleaf. This short passage, written in 1970, can capture according to (Smith, 2005, [1]), the essence of the leadership style under study. This simple yet profound and influential idea has been explored in numerous scientific articles and books over the past 35 years. The concept of leadership is perhaps the most overused term, as it has been attached to a wide range of diverse meanings, stakes, and implications. In various scientific articles, it is sometimes regarded as a structural characteristic of personality. At the same time, it has been linked to organisational conditions, while it has often been approached as a behavioural characteristic. Given the proven research value of the concept of leadership (it has been found to influence essential dimensions of organisational behaviour significantly), a deeper understanding of the nature of leadership is fundamental. Leadership has been defined as a process of exercising social influence within an organisation or group. In the same context, a leading individual (leader) will tend to initiate unseen and overt processes, where other individuals are supported in starting and completing tasks.

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At the same time, the leader can assume total responsibility for the risks associated with organisational success or failure. According to the above approach, a leader does not simply plan on the safe side, but leads by taking a significant, ongoing risk of achieving overall goals or total failure. Therefore, it is not merely an "objective" or statistical approach (where leadership tries to manage data and optimise strategies). One way to understand the above is this: leadership's "mathematical" navigation of holistic problems can be the tip of an iceberg (the visible part). The rest of the success can be based on what can fundamentally define the concept under study, or the part that is difficult to explain. Greenleaf emphasized that a leader is one who "steps forward and shows the way. He/she emphasizes "I am first, follow me" even when he/ she knows the path may be uncertain or dangerous (Don M. Frick, 2004, [2]). Characteristics that distinguish leaders from non-leaders or followers may be (among others) the enhanced levels of adaptability, persistence, integrity and self-confidence (Kantharia, 2011, [3]). The concept of servant leadership can be incredibly profound and misunderstood. It does not mean being the "follower of the followers", but rather the leader who can understand and manage the anxieties and thoughts of the followers (starting from the base) and shape them into a course, where they can take overall responsibility for success or failure. It should in no way be confused with transformational leadership (explained below). There is a close conceptual linkage between transformational and servant leadership. Transformational leadership occurs when leaders elevate the interests and ideas of employees and create a "higher" awareness and acceptance of the organization's goals and mission. At the same time, employees are encouraged to look beyond their self-interest while being empowered to achieve organizational goals (Bass, 1990,[4]). In transformational leadership, the primary focus is on the organization and its pursuits. The leader's vision is paramount (it is assumed to contribute to the long-term achievement of organizational goals). In contrast, the leadership style under analysis has a fundamental focus on the internal aspects and the followers/employees. Leaders of this type tend to value the individuals who comprise the organisation. This is not emotional targeting, but rather an unconditional concern for the well-being of those who comprise the organisation. According to (Stone et al.2004,[5]), the transformational leader's focus is on the organization and through various behaviors, followers' commitment to organizational goals is developed, while the servant leader's focus is on the employees themselves (the achievement of collective goals is of secondary importance). The status of leadership in organisational success cannot be ignored, as the impact of employee leadership on employee performance can be a key source of developing a competitive advantage for any organisation.

The roots of this style of leadership can be profound, as the leader tends to transform into a servant and vice versa (in line with the Christian perspective). Servant leadership has attracted researchers in the field of management sciences better to understand the role of leadership in organisational 2019,[6]). (Greenleaf 1977,[7]) performance (Liu, emphasized that the servant-leader must have a natural sense of wanting to serve first, before ruling. Therefore, the ideal leader of this type does not have as his primary purpose to rule, but to serve (he may, in theory, not even want to rule, but it may be a necessary step to serve essentially). (Malone and Fry, 2003,[8]) argued that leadership of this style is not about the characteristics of a leader's personality, but the leaders' attempt to be led to a fuller understanding of followers' needs/requirements, for them to develop certain attitudes and behaviors (ideally these attitudes are not preconceived, but tend to be imposed by the given approach framework of the leader). Therefore, given that the true conditions for the development of work attitudes and behaviours can be important, all of the above can be durable and significantly affect organisational performance. In essence, the most important element is probably the sincere trust in the organizational base (provided that the attitudes / behaviors that will lead to organizational success (under the influence of leadership) can be effortlessly / naturally and spontaneously created). Otherwise, shapes and patterns of control and direction of the above should be adopted, so that they can align with the thinking of the top of each organization. (Barbuto and Wheeler, 2006, [9]) argued that leadership of this kind, although thoroughly analyzed in the literature, has not been adequately understood in the context of contemporary organizations. (Laub, 2005,[10]). Argued that what essentially differentiates transformational and servant leadership is the importance placed on the interest of the workers (in the first instance the interest of the top leadership is everything, while the workers can be "enlightened" by deeply understanding the vision of the leadership and taking advantage the spiritual/psychological resources given to them). According to many authors, the concept needs to be better understood and more intensive research needs to be conducted (Patterson, 2003,[11]) showed an integrated model that reflected the cause-and-effect relationship between different variables that provide a conceptual direction towards understanding servant leadership, while they further suggested that followers showed more loyalty to their leaders and organizations, than others. Patterson also claimed that employees' primary emphasis was on leadership, as evidenced by the positive relationship between this leadership style and employee engagement. Servant leadership is considered a relatively new concept in the field of management and organisational behaviour; therefore, there is a relative lack of adequate empirical According and data. (Northouse, 1999, [12]), the concept requires stronger research support, as well as increased efforts in terms of its further understanding For example, (Drury, 2004, [13]), attempted to analyze the relationship between servant leadership, job satisfaction and organizational commitment, but concluded that there is a need to investigate the dimensions of servant leadership further

#### II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of "Servant Leadership" was first coined by Robert K. Greenleaf in the 1970s. As previously noted, a leader is a servant first. The author referred to two extreme forms of creating leadership tendencies and directions: leadership as a primary need and serving others as the second. At the same time, he emphasized that these archetypes constitute two extreme values and that there can be many intermediate stages and combinations, due to the infinite diversity of human nature.

One crucial aspect that may require clarification is the understanding of the concept of a follower or employee. He can be regarded as a person who voluntarily and actively participates in the above processes in response to the leader's initiatives (Banutu-Gomez 2004,[14]), emphasized that "to succeed, leaders must teach their followers not only how to lead, but also how to be good followers." Followers must learn to follow so that they can later become effective leaders. The concept has been applied to some extent by organizations, while according to (Arkin, 2004,[15]), companies that apply servant leadership comprise between 33-50% of Fortune magazine's 100 best companies. These companies include Starbucks Coffee Company and Southwest Airlines, among others.

However, the theory's focus on the leader's internal values versus external technique makes this view difficult to adopt. Commonly (as with transformational leadership), the problem is that there are leaders who either completely transform an organization (from the outside in), or from the inside out. The problem may be in how all the above are recognized, or measured. The answer can be important for companies to grow on a practical level. As (Russell, 2001,[16]) pointed out, "this leadership style can succeed or fail based on the personal values of the people who use it" Each of the central tenets of the servant leadership philosophy is explored below:

- 1. Servant-Leadership is strengthened when a leader takes the position of a servant during their interactions with followers. Authentic, legitimate leadership arises not from the exercise of power or from serving selfish ends, but from a fundamental desire to help others. Greenleaf noted that this simple fact is the key to achieving leadership excellence. The primary motivation is to encourage the greatness of others, while organisational success is a secondary component.
- 2. Holistic Approach- This leadership style holds that "the work exists for the person as much as the person exists for the work" The above may pose a challenge to organizations and the tacit assumptions of top leadership, as the theory promotes a perspective in which individuals should be encouraged to be authentic ('be who they are'), both professionally and personally. This direction may have the strongest long-term results
- 3. Promoting a sense of community Greenleaf called the reduction of this effort "lost knowledge". Therefore, only the instillation of a sense of community within an organization can induce the true satisfaction of the deepest aspirations of the community.

Moreover, this can only be achieved through the actions of respective leaders—the distribution of Decision-Making Power. Effective leadership can achieve maximum results only when it fosters the right conditions within the organisation. Through the development of participatory conditions, employee talent and motivation can be nurtured. As emphasized by Russell "leaders enable others to act, not by accumulating power, but by sharing it."

Greenleaf has been called "the father of the empowerment movement" because empowerment is one of the most essential characteristics of servant leadership (Russell & Stone, 2002). Empowerment involves trusting others with authority, genuinely helping them move forward, and includes meaningful listening, making people feel important, while emphasising teamwork and collaboration.

The same authors considered this leadership style a service to others, where the focus is on the development and well-being of employees as a central means of achieving organisational goals. These leaders tend to trust employees and their capabilities, holding the belief that they are giving their best to the organization and emphasize employees rather than the goals (Rosnani, 2018,[17]).

At the same time, these leaders can be presented as role models and serve as a source of inspiration for others, thereby fostering an environment of trust and confidence. They can encourage employees to make decisions autonomously, which can lead to fostering a climate that heartens innovation and creativity.

In the same context, the performance of managers is more effective in operational and financial objectives when there is a focus on people. To implement this style of leadership effectively, employees and their contributions should be valued in practice.

(Nair, 1994,[18]) observed that "Doing menial jobs does not necessarily mean that one is a servant leader. Rather, a leader invests in himself or herself to facilitate, refine, and empower others, helping them to be and to do their best" (p. 14). And "As long as power dominates leadership thinking, we cannot move individuals to a higher level."

Several views on this style of leadership suggest that to learn servant leadership, individuals must undertake a journey of self-discovery. Leaders of this type can be a group of people who interact with employees and are not a source of stress for them. According to (Russell & Stone, 2002,[19]), leaders of this style should develop certain traits, such as (among others): empathy, active listening, self-awareness, proactivity, commitment to personal development.

Regarding the above, three images will be presented. The first concerns the dimensions of the concept being studied, while the other two relate to the various relationships between servant leadership and organizational performance. In the first Image, the dimensions are mentioned: love (the most crucial concept that employees can perceive, as it can balance their demands and needs), altruism, empowerment, trust, and a sense of service (about employees).

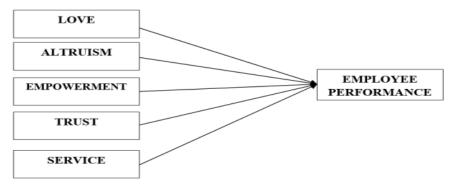


Figure 1: Servant Leadership Dimensions

**Source**: (Sarwar et al., 2021, [20])

In Figure 2 below, the model of (Bieńkowska et al., 2022, [21]) is shown.

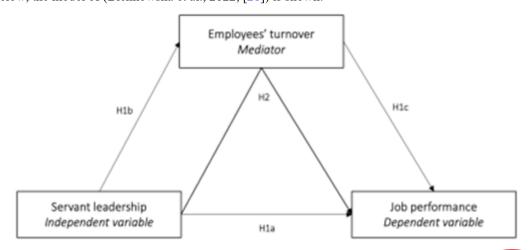


Figure 2: Servant Leadership and Organizational Performance

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Therefore, the variable under study has a significant effect on work performance, through the turnover variable (it explains the strong relationship between the other variables).

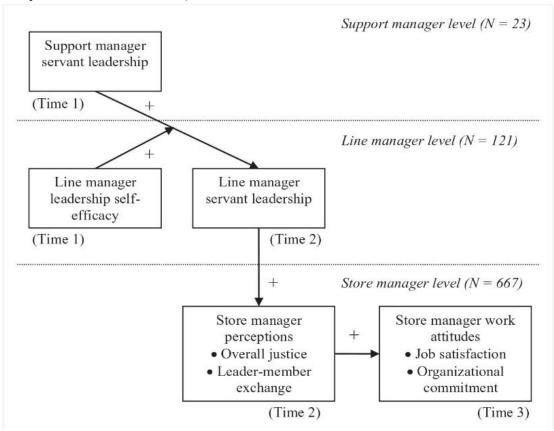


Figure 3: Servant Leadership and Organizational Performance

**Source**: (Kauppila et al., 2022, [22])

Finally, the above model shows how this leadership can ultimately affect job satisfaction (through perceived fairness, quality leadership-employee exchanges, etc.).

# III. ORGANIZATIONS PROFILE

Starbucks Corporation is a multinational coffee chain based in Seattle, United States It originally opened as a small shop in 1971 and has grown into a vast, multinational organization, revolutionizing the coffee industry in the United States. Howard Schultz was hired in 1982 to manage the company's retail sales and marketing. It was then that he made a trip to Italy, where he had an epiphany about the coffee industry. He visited the famous espresso bars of Milan and was enthralled by the culture and romance of the Italian shops. Returning, he decided to implement in the United States what he had experienced, but initially encountered many difficulties, particularly at the bureaucratic level. As a result, he left the original company and pursued his vision. His departure from the initial Starbucks company was so amicable that the founders subsequently invested in his vision after he revisited Italy for research purposes. After a while, Schultz began to succeed, while Starbucks had a disappointing performance. He then approached the "mother" company and acquired it, renaming it Starbucks Corporation. It is worth emphasizing that nothing would have happened if Schultz had not maintained a friendly relationship with his former partners. This may be the key to understanding servant leadership. It is an ethical philosophy in relation to business, where healthy, long-term, human relationships are developed (as far as possible). At the end of 1993, the chain had 275 stores and 425 a year later. In 1997, the total number of branches was 1,412, whereas in 2022, there were 34,317 stores worldwide.

# IV. RESEARCH

Howard Schultz's leadership style at Starbucks has been widely admired and studied by numerous scholars. Schultz is one of the rare examples of a successful implementation of the servant leadership philosophy. He managed to ensure the empowerment of the staff, which indirectly contributed to the organisation's global success. This practice led to a positive culture that continues to drive the company's performance. Starbucks has successfully implemented the main principles of servant leadership internally through various means. The leadership style of this company is characterised by a strong philosophy that supports its business model. The existing organizational culture has reinforced this management style. Leaders of Starbucks tend to guide staff to add value to the company at every level (in terms of relationships within/outside the organisation, products offered, etc.). Consumers can benefit indirectly from this management style, as they can enjoy high-quality products and services. The main principles that the company has adopted under study are empathy,



Commitment to the needs of employees and their development, awareness at many levels, and achieving transparency and sensitivity. The concept of openness has helped Starbucks achieve its goals. The organisation developed and implemented open communication forums several years ago to improve the quality of communication between employees and managers. This practice created a positive environment and climate that fostered work motivation and creativity (Ng et al., 2016, [23]). Additionally, employees were empowered to utilise their capabilities in meeting the evolving needs of diverse customers. The principle of empowerment appears not only to have been implemented but to have produced spectacular results.

Another principle that has been taken seriously is that of cooperation. Employees and managers communicate effectively and share ideas. Employees are encouraged to adopt an inquisitive attitude and identify new ways to enhance customer value.

In relation to the HRM strategy, a philosophy of eliminating differences and discrimination, fostering tolerance, and strengthening ties with various communities has been adopted. This strategy has led to the development of a thriving culture, where, on the one hand, different ideas are promoted, and on the other hand, they can be applied in various parts of the world. For example, managers at Starbucks "routinely" offer practical guidance to subordinates.

Starbucks leaders have consistently been prepared to address the needs of their stakeholders, including employees, communities, and customers. Motivated employees find it easier to deliver superior service to their respective customers. Community members are motivated by the numerous opportunities and programs that help meet their needs.

Essentially, the company has fostered a positive culture that empowers employees from diverse backgrounds. This can be an extremely important task, as it can promote strong, positive feelings of employee recognition and a willingness to give back. This may explain the company's significant profitability over the past few years. Additionally, the company has shaped its culture by introducing policies and programs that enhance performance. A healthy work environment, combined with performance-enhancing measures. can work wonders (whereas performance-enhancing measures through incentives alone can lead to complicated situations and misunderstandings). The company has finally adopted and effectively communicates corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives, while providing scholarships and other services to various members of the community.

## V. ANALYSIS

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#### VI. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

As world economies develop, they transition into the information age, while the service sector continues to grow and strengthen. Modern, complex organizations are increasingly expected to have to compete in delivering meaning to an ever-increasing share of consumers and employees (future and existing).

Therefore, success for businesses depends on fulfilling the elements of learning and innovation. Organizations must become "learning organizations of the future", which may involve a total shift in organizational emphasis from the production of goods/services to the development of workers who can learn, innovate or support innovation. Therefore, the question is which leadership styles or organisational variables, in general, can lead to the achievement of the above.

The question, then, is how an organisation can implement the above considerations. How can an organization implement servant leadership? The answer might be simple—maybe it can't. What it can do is to gain a deep understanding of what makes these leaders so effective and try to develop the "matching conditions", depending on the context (country of operation, culture, employees, etc.), to achieve these positive outcomes.

Organizations may be in such a volatile/fluid environment that the "original thinking" of some capable leaders may not be enough. The accumulated knowledge of employees who are in daily contact with customers (electronically, physically, etc.) can be the future source of achieving comparative advantage. However, to mobilise and utilise this amount of knowledge, perhaps the type of leadership discussed above is necessary. It is easy to dismiss this form of leadership as "idealistic," but it is increasingly favoured. It's easy to be cynical and argue that "that's not the way the world is" or that businesses don't think that way. This may be the reason why modern companies face significant problems in attracting and retaining talent, as well as reduced employee satisfaction. At the same time, the younger generation tends to become increasingly informed and cynical. Servant leadership may be the future for organisations looking to gain an edge, and the more knowledge of employees is harnessed, the greater the chances of achieving organisational success are increased.

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Authors Contributions	I am the sole author of the article.

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