



THE CONCEPT OF „SERVANT LEADERSHIP“ IN THE STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES IN THE ORGANIZATION

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Abstract: *The material examines the potential of leadership as a modern concept in management. Definitions of leadership are summarized and ideas about the abilities of leaders in certain areas are enriched. The presentation of the concept of „servant leadership“ is preceded by the clarification of concepts relevant to the topic under consideration. Servant leadership as an approach to strategic human resource management imperatively reminds that the person is the active party in every interaction. An interdisciplinary approach is applied and solutions are sought for the organization in modern conditions.*

Keywords: *leadership, servant leadership, servant leader, human resources, strategic human resource management, organization*

Management science is closely related to the art of achieving from and through others, which is why it always feels the rhythm of changes very accurately. People are its main components. And more precisely, those people in whom the attitude to unite and cooperate is equally embedded with the desire to compete and excel.

In order to adequately respond to the challenges of the times, modern management, in its path of development, is constantly adopting new ideas, unifying approaches, and seeking strategic alternatives. Along this path, it also turns its attention to leadership.

The aim of this paper is to enrich the existing scientific knowledge related to leadership theories, based on an analysis of literary sources, by examining the concept of „servant leadership“. In this way, to prove the idea that leadership as a phenomenon, when placed within the framework of ongoing social processes, has good opportunities in activities related to the strategic management of human resources in the modern organization.

Leadership as a phenomenon has long been the subject of in-depth research. And despite the efforts of researchers, it is still difficult to give an exact definition of what leadership is. The definition of the concept will always be subject to the specifics of the scientific goals pursued. The interpretation by Ralph Stogdill is interesting, it has become a starting point in various studies and has been adopted by other authors. It contains different definitions of leadership according to key ideas in the definitions of the phenomenon under consideration. For example, leadership as: [7, 103-104]

Center of group interests. This approach notes the fact that the leader is the spiritual and emotional center of the group. The leader determines the group structure, atmosphere, ideology and group interests. He has sole authority and everyone obeys him willingly.

Manifestation of personality traits. The leader is a person who possesses certain personality traits that allow him to successfully establish himself in leadership positions.

The art of achieving agreement. The main emphasis is on the skills that are necessarily inherent in the leader to achieve agreement between the people he leads and to encourage them to agree with him. The leader is obliged to suppress conflicts. This type of leadership is called consensual and is seen as a tool for subordinating the group to the will of the leader.

Action and behavior. Leadership behavior is considered to be all activities undertaken by the leader to manage and coordinate work groups. Such as delegation of authority, positive or negative stimulation of group members, motivation of associates, and focus on achieving goals.

A tool for achieving goals or results. Effective leadership is associated with achieving results and meeting the needs of all group members.

Interaction. Leadership is understood as the effect of group actions. In accordance with this approach, a necessary condition for leadership is the support of group members. Therefore, leadership is understood as such interpersonal relationships in which group members perform their tasks precisely because they themselves want to.

The ability to persuade. The difference between leadership and management is examined. If management is often understood as the art of coercion and the use of force or threats to make people act in certain directions, then the leader manages with the help of convictions, incentives and the power of personal example. Such behavior is characteristic of various organizations, but largely informal.

Exercising influence. Leadership is viewed as a process of influencing the activities of organized groups by means of additional norms and prescriptions for the performance of tasks. In this case, great importance is attached to interpersonal relationships.

Power relationship. In this case, power relationships are considered as a form of leadership relationships, as the ability of a person to dominate others and overcome the resistance of subordinates. If one individual in an organized group can change the behavior of other individuals, then this is the work of a leader. Moreover, some leaders are more capable than others of transforming the leadership relationship into power by proxy.

Role differentiation. According to role theory, all members of societies, groups, and public organizations occupy a certain place in the social status system. Each participant in the leadership/subordination relationship plays a certain role, and leadership can be viewed as role differentiation. The basis of such differentiation is the process of interaction and mutual influence between group members, when one individual influences others, and others react to this influence.

Initiation or construction of group structure. Leadership is seen as a process that creates and maintains the role structure of the group. The leader seeks to construct the structure of the group in order to legitimize his leadership status. Such processes are especially important at the stage of the emergence of a new organization and the creation of work teams whose structure does not yet have an established character.

The definitions considered are also the basis of many theories that show the evolution of leadership. They are: great man theory, trait theory, power and influence theory, behaviorist theory, situational theory, contingency theory, transactional theory, attributional theory, transformational theory, etc [6, 243-245].

According to summaries by Bulgarian researchers, theoretical approaches to clarifying leadership suggest considering it as a set of innate personality qualities, behavioral theories, or a set of situational factors. It is pointed out that there are other types of concepts to which servant leadership refers [5, 127].

The concept of „servant leadership“ was introduced by Roberge Greenleaf in 1970. In Bulgarian literature it is also found as „servant leadership“. It is accepted as a philosophical



justification, a „philosophy of management“, and not as an empirically verified theory [5, 132; 1, 36; 4, 115-116]. The focus of this concept is to prioritize the needs of others, not one's own. The servant leader does not seek to expand his own power and privileges, but seeks to serve his team members, customers, and community. This leadership style is beginning to emerge as an effective way to build strong teams, foster engagement, and achieve sustainable results.

In the specialized literature, it is presented that R. Greenleaf describes the main characteristics of a servant leader as follows:

- actively listens to identify the needs and desires of others;
- understands not only his own feelings, but also those of others;
- seeks to protect himself and others from failure and suffering;
- decision-making is based on conviction rather than power and authority;
- has proactive behavior and conceptual thinking about the results of the group or team's activities;
- he encourages the personal and professional growth of associates;
- he strives to create a sense of community both inside and outside the work organization [5, 132].

Other authors conclude that a servant leader is emotionally intelligent [1, 36].

The concept under consideration is interpreted in a similar way by other authors [2, 204-205], who describe the servant leader as a person who:

- loves people, sympathizes with them, is compassionate towards them and is sincerely concerned about their well-being;
- creates sustainable values by realizing that quick and short-term success is not very difficult to achieve and for this reason is inspired by goals that are bigger than himself;
- creates what will remain after him and manages to achieve significant and sustainable results;
- leads the organization from within, with the clear awareness that most business strategies must come from within the company if we want to keep up with the rapidly changing world;
- has a clear vision for the future;
- has a spiritual vision and cares for the moral change of people and raises their consciousness;
- engages people according to their abilities;
- knows how to study the nature of others;
- knows how best to engage and involve people;
- understands people well, helping them realize the difference between „I want“ and „I need.“
- leaves behind culture, high quality and craftsmanship, and this is called a chain of succession.
- leaves behind successors, people who will continue his mission.

Of interest are the characteristics of the servant leader, derived by Larry Spears [9], but also studied by a number of other researchers, including Bulgarian authors [4, 117-118]:

1. Listening: A key trait of servant leaders is the ability to actively and attentively listen. They seek to identify and clarify the will of the group by using receptive listening and reflection. The servant leader listens to understand, not just to respond, paying attention to verbal and nonverbal cues.

2. Empathy: Servant leaders strive to understand and empathize with the feelings and experiences of others. They actively listen and put themselves in the shoes of their employees.

3. Healing: Servant leaders are eager to help improve relationships and resolve conflicts within the team. In doing so, they promote emotional and spiritual healing in themselves and others. They strive to create an environment that promotes well-being.

4. Awareness: Servant leaders possess a high level of self-awareness, which allows them to understand their strengths, weaknesses, and their impact on others. Awareness requires a belief on the part of the leader that they have the power and the ability to deal with the problem and find a solution. This awareness helps them make better decisions.

5. Persuasion: Rather than using their power to impose decisions, servant leaders use argument and persuasion to inspire and motivate others.

6. Conceptualization: Servant leaders are able to think abstractly and see the big picture. They have a vision for the future and can communicate it effectively.

7. Foresight: This trait refers to the ability to foresee potential future consequences of current actions. Servant leaders think strategically about long-term impact.

8. Stewardship: Servant leaders see themselves as stewards of the resources and people they lead. They feel responsible for the well-being and development of those they serve.

9. Commitment to the Growth of People: They actively invest in the personal and professional development of their employees, providing opportunities for learning and growth.

10. Building Community: Servant leaders strive to build a strong sense of community and belonging within the organization, encouraging collaboration and mutual support.

We fully support the statement that strategic human resource management is a predictable and justified formation of an organization's effective human resource potential, taking into account current and upcoming changes in its external and internal environment [3, 226].

Leading authors [8, 20] point out the main functions of strategic human resource management:

- developing the organization's human resources strategy so that it corresponds to its market and technological strategy and leads to their implementation;
- developing a plan/plans for implementing the human resources strategy adopted by the organization;
- organizing the work to implement the developed plans, ensuring the implementation of the adopted strategy in the field of human resources;
- coordinating the work to implement the plans ensuring the implementation of the adopted strategy in the field of human resources;
- controlling the functioning human resources management system in the organization;
- development and implementation of programs to improve the strategic and operational human resources management system

The implementation of these functions reinforces the idea that strategic human resource management is a specific way of managing an organization that relies on human potential. This allows for flexible response to the challenges of the external environment by making timely changes in the organization in order to achieve competitive advantages. All this allows the organization to survive in the long term and achieve previously set goals [3, 225-226].

In the context of the above, we believe that the concept of „servant leadership” has an important role in strategic human resource management. Servant leadership offers a philosophy and practices that can enrich and transform the way organizations manage their people. This is why the connection between servant leadership and human resource management is direct, deep and strategically significant. At its core is the focus on the



person: the servant leadership style coincides with the humanistic approach in modern strategic human resource management, whose main function is to create and maintain an environment in which people can develop and contribute effectively. Servant leaders build trust, commitment and loyalty in employees, and this directly supports strategic human resource management goals such as talent retention, motivation, high productivity and organizational culture. It can be argued that employees led by servant leaders are more engaged and less likely to leave. People development is one of the main characteristics of servant leadership, but at the same time, training, mentoring, career development are key tasks of human resource management. A leader who is guided by the principles of service naturally becomes a mentor. Servant leadership creates a culture of respect, cooperation, openness and trust, and this is the basis for a healthy work environment, which human resource management strives for through policies and initiatives.

In our opinion, the benefits of applying the concept of „servant leadership“ in strategic human resources management can be sought in the following areas:

- creating a positive organizational environment;
- humane approach to management;
- maintaining good collegial relations;
- strong organizational culture;
- increasing management efficiency;
- achieving staff commitment and involvement.

In conclusion, it can be said that the generalization of contemporary views and the complementation of theoretical knowledge prove the potential of the concept of „servant leadership“ in the strategic management of human resources in the modern organization. Servant leadership is a philosophy that can give a humane dimension to the strategically oriented management of human resources, not only complementing it, but also making it more ethical and more sustainable. By focusing on the development and well-being of others, servant leaders not only contribute to a better work environment, but also to more successful and sustainable organizations. It is rightly believed that in order to survive in the 21st century, we need a new generation of leaders, not managers. Examining the definitions of leadership and the main areas for possessing certain qualities, provides grounds for directing efforts for building, training, education and development.

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