

Chapter 7

People First: The Power of Servant Leadership

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ABSTRACT

The growing need for leaders to adapt to current demands has intensified interest in leadership studies. This article explores servant leadership, a people-centered approach introduced by Robert K. Greenleaf in 1970,

DOI: 10.4018/979-8-3373-2690-0.ch007

which reverses traditional hierarchical structures to prioritize employees' growth and well-being. Rooted in empathy, humility, altruism, and integrity, this model promotes humanized, productive work environments. Servant leaders differ from traditional ones by offering active listening, support, and guidance, empowering teams to excel. The study analyzes theoretical foundations, practical applications, and real-world examples of organizations implementing this approach. Although challenges exist—especially in rigid or highly competitive environments—successful cases reveal its potential to address modern organizational challenges. Ultimately, servant leadership not only improves performance but fosters ethical, loyal, and sustainable relationships, playing a key role in business success.

INTRODUCTION

Zenger and Folkman (2015) state that unfortunately, the concept of leadership continues to be misunderstood and that if you try asking 100 people to define leadership, you will get 100 different answers.

The evolution of management models is keeping pace with the social, cultural and technological transformations that have taken place over the last few decades. In this scenario, servant leadership has emerged as an innovative and humanized approach that puts the needs of the team at the forefront, prioritizing employee development and building collaborative organizational environments. This paper aims to analyse the rise of servant leadership and discuss how this approach can transform organizational culture and performance, showing that unlike traditional models, in which the leader is positioned as the center of power and decision-making, servant leadership proposes the inversion of the hierarchy, valuing the participation and empowerment of team members. This paradigm shift has a significant impact on the motivation, creativity and productivity of employees, with a direct impact on the success of organizations.

To carry out this study, the bibliographic method was adopted, with analysis and interpretation of various academic sources, scientific articles, specialized books and case studies. The research is exploratory in nature and aims to answer the following question: What are the main benefits and challenges of implementing servant leadership as a strategy for or-

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