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Servant Leadership: An Ideal Global Leadership Style for Team Learning in Multicultural Organizations

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Abstract

This paper seeks to enhance the capacity of the global leader by proposing the unique characteristics of servant-leadership which could enhance the development and sustenance of strategies for multicultural leaders to navigate the international landscape and foster business growth and success. In light of this we make propositions that take a look at servant leadership for team learning in a culturally diverse work environment. This paper adopts the approach of a philosophical/conceptual discussion by reviewing the literature as effective leadership in inter-cultural management is gradually being highlighted in the literature. From a review of the relevant literature this paper conceptualizes the impact of servant leadership style in instilling greater confidence in team members for multicultural team learning in contemporary organizations. Technological advancement has expanded the global economy which has changed the way people communicate when doing business. As such, global leaders need to be equipped with the leadership skills that are required in the multicultural workplace and this is both a challenge and an opportunity for organizational learning and growth as well as individual development. This paper integrates new relationships and offers propositions that take a look at the new wave of servant leadership for team learning in culturally diverse workplace development and intercultural management for this fast-paced global knowledge economy.

Keywords

Servant Leadership, Global Leadership, Multicultural Teams, Cultural Diversity, Team Learning

1. Introduction

Globalization and its attendant interaction of cultures has made the success of today's organization dependent on how effectively it is managed across national and cultural boundaries [1-4]. Consequently, this change makes it difficult to imagine that a single individual leader is able to possess the skills and capacity that is required to lead. Leadership is increasingly become a collective activity, spanning across geographic boundaries. As such, globalization is changing the nature of leadership in such a way that effective leaders need to rely heavily on personal and relational sources of power and therefore, engage others in the process of shared leadership [5]. Given the present global environment of business as well as the increasing diversity of workforces, a keen awareness of multicultural competence in management is key to the career success of both present and aspiring global leaders and professionals [6, 7].

Global Leadership (GL) is defined as "the process and actions through which an individual influences a range of in-

ternal and external constituents from multiple national cultures and jurisdictions in a context characterized by significant levels of task and relationship complexity" [8]. Global leadership is complex especially because it is exercised on a highly-diverse global team [5]. Global leaders therefore need to advance their leadership skills which are required in a global context. Conditions for effective leadership in global environments comprises a global mind-set with cultural awareness, interpersonal skills, and effective employee relationships [2, 3]. With the ever increasing changes as a result of globalization, leaders are likely to face new challenges in managing relationships. Some of these challenges would be the ability to interrelate efficiently with diverse partners and businesses within the larger context of different cultures. Global human resource development and business management groups would be useful to discover and empirically investigate the essential leadership skills for global leaders. People in the workplace are expected to interact with people from diverse cultural backgrounds who speak diverse languages, exhibit different lifestyles, have diverse belief systems, cultural backgrounds and different approaches to problems [9]. This is known as Cultural Diversity (CD) in the workplace and it is regarded as a mixed blessing for teams [10].

Cultural diversity also facilitates the provision of diverse ideas and information, making it a key ingredient for team creativity [11]. The downside of cultural diversity is that it can be a source of either conflict or friction and therefore likely to become an obstacle to effective team learning and performance. However, through synergistic efforts of inter-cultural management, it can become a source of learning and creating something new [9]. Inter-cultural refers to a situation where people from diverse cultures learn from one another, understand and respect one another as they work or grow together [10, 11]. Inter-cultural management therefore refers to the process of managing the dynamics between people with different backgrounds to achieve positive results [10]. The primary factor of intercultural management is the ability to understand and value diversity. Cultural diversity may also incur social costs like cultural identity difficulties in intercultural interaction [12], which is likely to offset the creative and innovative potential of diverse groups [13].

Servant Leadership (SL) is a flourishing new research and leadership theory that is connected to ethics, virtues and morality [14, 15]. It is believed to be a transformative leadership model that facilitates a learning environment to empower others [16] and foster the personal and professional development of employees. The term was coined by Robert K. Greenleaf in the 1970s, over five decades ago but it still remains understudied although it is practiced in boardrooms and organizations [17]. Since Greenleaf (1977) conceptualized servant leadership as a way of life rather than a management technique, its acceptance in academia may have crumbled because scholars began to ask the question: "if it is a way of life, how can it be empirically tested?" as " it is not meant to

be a scholarly treatise or a how-to-do-it manual " [18]. The theory of Servant Leadership focuses on service to others and recognizes the role organizations must play to create individuals who can build a better tomorrow [16]. This resonates with scholars and practitioners who respond to the growing perceptions that corporate leaders must stop being selfish and rather seek to help solve the challenges of the 21st century.

Ultimately, majority of research on servant leadership involves developing theoretical frameworks and establishing measurement tools that will enable future scholars to use in practice and as a tenable theory to explore the construct. In the light of this, Dennis and Bocarnea (2005) develop the first instrument that measures five factors on the concept of servant leadership, identified as qualities or virtues that characterize a servant leader's attitudes and behaviour: love, humility, trust, vision and empowerment [19]. This instrument, which is a build-up on Patterson (2003)'s theory of servant leadership is very essential for collecting surveys and applying statistical tests [20]. It is also able to help leaders measure their effectiveness in the values of a servant leader. The relationship between a servant leader and his followers must be founded on unconditional love [21] in such a way that the leader will genuinely care for and consider their needs, wants and desires [15]. Humility is seen in a servant leader as he shows respect for, and acknowledges the contribution of his followers [17]. Trust is also a vital trait of the servant leader as he models truth and confidence and reliance in the form of coaching, empowering and persuading [17, 22].

Greenleaf (2003) addresses servant leadership by establishing that the servant-leader *is "*servant first*"*. According to him "It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve *first*" [23], after which the choice to lead follows. This means that one who chooses to serve first, "is distinctly different from one who is *leader* first." He goes further to affirm that, "The "leader first" and the "servant first" are two extreme types" of leaders, and distinguishes between the leader who decides to lead first and the one who decides to serve first. The "servant first" leader ensures that other people's priorities are attended to first.

Servant leadership shares some common ground with spiritual leadership, although they both exhibit distinct characteristics [24]. Servant leaders emphasizes on serving others and putting their needs first as they foster a sense of community. Spiritual leaders, on the other hand, integrate faith, purpose and values into their leadership practices to impact the spiritual wellbeing of their followers, even though they also exhibit servant leadership traits because they emphasize service and empathy [25]. While servant leaders see themselves as stewards who are responsible for the well-being of their team and organization, spiritual leaders focus not only on professional growth but also on the spiritual well-being of their followers. Spiritual leaders also inspire others to embrace spirituality and ethical behaviour. Servant leaders also align with spiritual values but do not necessarily require a specific religious context. In sum, both servant leaders and

spiritual leaders emphasize selflessness and growth [24].

Team Learning (TL) was pioneered by Senge (1990) as an organizational learning discipline that facilitates the development of effective teams [26]. Teams have become very important building blocks for organizations because of the rapid changes in both their internal and external environment [27]. The aim of learning is not only for enhancing employees' knowledge and skills but also for the development and growth of the organization as a whole, and consequently, building flexible and dynamic learning organizations. Team learning is essential for effective organizational learning because a team's newly acquired knowledge can be easily transferred to other departments, and eventually to the entire organization [27]. As knowledge has become a critical resource for growth and success in organizations especially in this competitive context of global business, organizational learning has been proposed as a strategic tool for sustaining competitive advantage and stabilizing organizational relevance [28]. Finally, team learning also contributes to the development of learning organizations because as team members interact, explore and exploit new knowledge, they develop their capacity to create the desired results [26, 28].

Multicultural relates to group consisting of people from several nationalities or cultures and multicultural teams refer to teams that consist of individuals who come from different cultures working together on activities that extend national borders" [29]. Multicultural Teams (MT) are usually culturally diverse and are seen as a wellspring of new knowledge or ideas that birth creativity and innovativeness [30].

They can be placed within a single location (known as co-location) or be geographically dispersed with their members usually communicating virtually with each other [11, 31]. A virtual multicultural team environment is therefore, a dynamic environment which is different in many ways from a co-located team environment [32]. Although multicultural teams have a great potential of creativity, they may be confronted with difficulties that arise from different communication and working styles which must be proactively managed right from the start of their team formation [30]. These communication challenges, if not well managed, can create barriers to effective teamwork which reduces information sharing, leading to interpersonal conflicts [2]. With the ever growing scope of globalization, inter-cultural management is beginning to have some impact in global business practices as managers have to manage more than one culture [4].

The role of leadership's capacity and function keeps getting complicated as a result of increased involvement in globalization and technological advancement [33]. Since globalization and technology have been accelerating business changes and generating challenges, today's global leaders require a set of competencies that will enable them to implement their vision and lead effectively [3, 16, 34]. In order to handle these new developments, international business trainers and facilitators need to respond rapidly to the impacts of technology, demographics and globalization by offering the requisite set of competencies in global leadership, work ethics, and continuous learning [3, 7]. Global business success is contingent on an effective workforce diversity management. In order to lead effectively in today's globalized world, multicultural leaders must to be able to achieve culturally diverse settings efficiently. This is known as a capability of cultural intelligence, otherwise known as cultural quotient [35] and is related to individual international experiences in which global leaders need to be aware of and appreciate the diversity they face in their leadership practices [36]. A leader who acquires the requisite skills and abilities for global business can manage diversity and implement complex business strategies to improve his international competitiveness and performance efficiency. Being a successful global leader is therefore not an easy task. In order not to fail, one must know the exigencies of leadership and execute it accordingly. People with different cultural backgrounds are bound to vary in their conception of leadership. For example, the extent to which Western leadership theories apply globally is now questionable as Japanese leadership practice is different from the West by its cultural traditions and perspectives in business practices [37].

Group dynamics is also seen to be playing a key role in global leadership practice. Different leadership styles and approaches need to be applied on the basis of the group dynamics [33]. In order to create a long-term leadership, global leaders must be skilled in cultural awareness and practices of diverse people. They must know the significance of leadership expectations, develop and sustain effective leadership strategies for long-term change. Few studies have discussed the positive effects of servant leadership on organizational profits, employee satisfaction and organizational learning and innovation [38-42]. However, there is a gap in research on servant-leadership in multicultural settings. This paper seeks to improve the capacity of the global leader by embracing the unique characteristics of servant-leadership which can help develop strategies for multicultural leadership to navigate across cultures and foster successful growth. We therefore make propositions that take a look at servant leadership for team learning in a culturally diverse work environment.

2. Literature Review

In order to effectively navigate cultural differences, global leaders need to acquire both cultural intelligence and intercultural competence [3]. Intercultural competence refers to "a set of cognitive, affective, and behavioural skills and characteristics that support effective and appropriate interaction in a variety of cultural contexts" [43]. To better clarify cognitive, affective and behavioural skills, Bennett and Bennett (2004) tried to synthesize them with *mind-set, heart-set and skillset*, to better explain the meaning of cultural competence. Mind-set, referring to the cognitive aspect is related to what one knows about cultures in general. Heart-set referring to the affective aspect is related to how a person feels about cultural

differences. Finally, skillset, referring to the behavioural aspect is related to a person's ability to gather information, empathize, listen, build relationships, and adapt a variety of cultures, leading to the acquisition of skills to navigate cultural differences. Cultural literacy, which is synonymous with cultural competency, also refers to the ability to know about cultural differences and leverage those differences for inter-cultural leader success, especially in cross-cultural work places [44].

Servant leadership has proven to be an ethical type of leadership that emphasizes on followers and focuses on their needs [45]. This type of leadership is gaining more grounds as organizations now work across geographical and political borders and are faced with ethnic and cultural diversity [46]. Servant leadership is now widely seen as playing a key role in the success of organizations and therefore an engine that drives organizations to performance excellence [47]. In fact some well-known American multinational companies such as Starbucks and Marriott have attested to this assertion by attributing their success to servant leadership [48].

It helped them build a culture of belongingness and empowered their teams to contribute their best for the organizational goals and objectives. Previous research has also demonstrated that servant leadership was positively related to employees' organizational citizenship behaviour, and in-role performance, [41, 42, 47, 49].

Modern workplaces now embrace individuals from different ethnicities and are therefore culturally diverse. This poses leadership challenges for global organizations and leaders now see the need to adopt a leadership style that equips them with relevant knowledge of managing diverse workplaces to enhance their leadership roles. Since cultural diversity influences the performance of employees in many ways, servant leaders focus on the need to understand and strategize their approach regarding delegation of authority, accountability, relationships, privacy and time management [50]. We therefore discuss the following servant-leadership characteristics propounded by Greenleaf, (2003) to facilitate a better knowledge and understanding of the appropriateness of this leadership style for intercultural leaders in multicultural work settings [23]. These characteristics are: *Listening; Self-awareness; Foresight; Empathy; Conceptualization; Healing Relationships; Persuasion; Commitment to growth of others; Building Community*. We espouse them to help develop our propositions.

Research has shown that Servant Leaders seeks the welfare of employees by giving support to individual group members, nurturing the broader potential of individual members, minimizing relationship conflicts and hammering a sense of community work within the work groups or teams [51]. In multicultural leadership situations, the characteristic of the "listening servant-leader" is an excellent approach when it comes to understanding the heart, soul and mind of people by listening to them first, and then reflecting. Such leaders are able to listen to team members individually and this helps to unearth new insights and perspectives, thereby enabling the leader to connect the dots. In a multicultural setting, Moseley (2009) suggests that leaders need to engage in active listening with a focus to understand, and not to judge [52]. This will improve communication skills across cultures, such that leaders could teach their followers how to engage in active listening. Especially in multicultural working environment where conflicts, disharmony and animosity are the result of cultural differences, servant leaders who demonstrate an inclusive mind-set, are able to maintain and progress harmony in ethnic and cultural diversity. The characteristic of "building community" enables the servant leader to bring his team members together by fostering a deep sense of community in which they form a close-knit community where one watches out for the other in spite of their cultural differences. The servant leader is also able to positively contribute to society through his stewardship, by accepting responsibility for the well-being of the entire community, and being conscious and mindful of the impact of decisions made on future generations. One of the powerful strengths of servant-leadership is the potential for healing themselves and others since learning to heal is a great force for transformation and integration by repairing one's broken spirit or making one whole [17, 23]. The servant leader is also able to use his emotional healing capabilities to help his followers to recover from hardship or traumatic experiences [22, 23] especially in a multicultural working environment where conflicts, disharmony and animosity are inevitable.. A servant leader exhibits traits of a leader who is able to lead his followers in a diverse cultural setting [53]. Whitfield (2014) develops a framework which describes the different features and aspects of Servant Leadership in nine cultural dimensions which provide multicultural leaders with enhanced capability in their culturally diverse work settings [54, 55]. These characteristics of the servant leadership style creates an all-inclusive and collaborative culture within the organization to effectively mitigate cultural obstructions and remove cultural dissimilarities [54]. This fosters employee enthusiasm and enhances performance. We therefore make this proposition that:

Proposition 1: *Servant leadership is positively related to the performance and effectiveness of multicultural teams.*

Servant leaders employ the principle of diversity intelligence to thrive well for the needs and aspirations of their team members and effectively guide them [56, 57]. Diversity intelligence is the capability to value diversity and allow it to guide one's behaviour and thinking. Servant leaders encourage diversity intelligence that helps in coaching and developing a diverse workforce, thereby creating an environment of trust and unity in the organization [57]. The characteristic of "Commitment to growth of others" allows the servant leader to meet the needs of those he serve as he believes that his followers have an intrinsic value beyond their tangible contributions as employees [17]. The servant-leader is aware of his responsibility to nurture the personal, professional, and spiritual growth of his employees. Through his altruistic

calling, the servant leader is able to make a positive difference in other people's lives, as he puts other people's interests ahead of his own. When servant leaders understand and address the emotions of their followers, it creates a positive workplace climate [58] that could facilitate learning new pathways. Servant leaders also demonstrate the ability to influence team performance by affirming team strengths and potential through the provision of collective developmental support for teams [59]. Servant leaders also demonstrate a strong developmental orientation, support skill development and provide feedback in a timely manner [49]. This improves the task performance of employees by enhancing their abilities to meet their objectives, learn new pathways and perform to that effect [49, 59]. This show that servant leaders are positively associated with individual and team performance [60]. Servant leaders are able create a positive and collaborative atmosphere that allows the team to enjoy being listened to, understood, guided, valued, and esteemed [55]. Servant leaders promote innovation as they encourage employee participation in decision making, such that new ideas are shared and this renews their knowledge acquisition potentials. Giving a voice to the employees promotes the unearthing of new ideas to improve the current situation [61]. Further, Servant leaders use their persuasive mapping capabilities to encourage their followers, offering them compelling reasons to act in a certain way. Persuasion in multicultural work settings is relevant, especially in collaborating with work or team mates who choose to minimize cultural differences [22]. In multicultural organizations empathy is imperative and key to developing relationships. There is therefore, a growing importance of empathy for global business leaders to succeed. Cross-cultural dialogue can easily lead to misunderstandings for which empathy is an antidote. A servant never rejects, but always tries to understand, accept and empathize with others," [23]. The most successful servant-leaders are those who have mastered the skill of becoming empathetic listeners [17]. We therefore make this proposition that:

Proposition 2: *Servant leadership is positively related to effective team learning.*

Multicultural teams is an outcome of globalization which has also necessitated a unique role played by advanced technology as an indispensable tool for multinational organizations that have elected to move beyond the geographic constraints of co-location to a virtual workplace in all aspects of global business relations [62]. Cross-cultural communication refers to the communication between culturally diverse people who belong to different value orientations within an environment of work and socialization [63]. This means that cross-cultural communication is an emotional process involving some uncertainty and likely potential for misunderstanding between multicultural team members [64]. As such, acquiring the necessary competencies for cross-cultural communication to manage cross-cultural uncertainties with cultural empathy and interpersonal skills is very essential [65]. The ability to communicate effectively in a multicultural

setting is contingent on the ability of team players to successfully decode and encode messages in such a manner that they are understood within the others' cultural contexts. Further, transmitting information through multiple dimensions such as visual cues and voice modulations facilitates the learning abilities of people, although in multicultural settings, the use of the above communication techniques may not resonate with others who do not share the same culture cues. Moreover, many of these dimensions may not be available to those working in a virtual environment. Global virtual teams rely on technology to facilitate knowledge transfer, exchange and sharing [66]. A team which comprises people from varying backgrounds and cultures can benefit from a greater pool of diverse ideas and expertise that team members contribute [67, 68]. Research has proven that culturally diverse teams tend to enhance team performance and creativity [6, 67]. Working with people from different cultures is also source of motivation and has a positive effect on the team spirit, as team members share their diverse cultural life styles, customs, policies, and historical perspectives [30]. Other crucial elements that are required for creating a knowledge-based environment to foster an interactive space include leadership, team trust, relational bonds, inter-cultural communication, competence, and inter-cultural training where virtual team members are actively encouraged to engage in frequent reciprocal inter-cultural exchange of ideas and solutions. This concept of shared understanding is known as a collective way of organizing relevant knowledge which can influence teams' ability to co-ordinate work and perform well [69, 70]. Additionally, the creative and problem-solving capabilities of global virtual teams' emerge from their culturally mediated knowledge structure and shared knowledge base. Although research has focused on how the lack of physical presence as well as the multicultural nature of such a team provides many challenges as mentioned earlier, yet, what has not been explored is that the knowledge that is generated is itself culturally constructed, defined and constrained by the global virtual team members. Likewise, the quality and deep sense of intra-team member relationships impacts the creation and maintenance of a shared knowledge base. Further, diversity in cultural backgrounds will lead to a greater diversity in knowledge and expertise since knowledge is an important factor for problem solving and creative solutions [30]. The resultant effect is that individual knowledge will be enlarged through the access of different knowledge backgrounds of multicultural team members, thereby enhancing team learning. We therefore make this proposition that:

Proposition 3: *Multicultural team work is positively related to team learning enhancement.*

Self-awareness gives strength to the servant-leader as it enables him to understand issues involving ethics and values. It also enables him to view most situations from a more integrated, holistic position. According to Greenleaf (2003) "Awareness is not a giver of solace but rather, a disturber and an awakener. Able leaders are usually sharply awake and

reasonably disturbed. They are not seekers after solace. They have their inner serenity" [23]. The inner serenity of servant-leaders is crucial in exercising foresight, especially in decision making. Additionally, Foresight refers to the ability of leaders to foresee expected outcomes. It is a characteristic that gives servant-leaders an understanding of lessons from the past, realities of the present, and likely consequence of a decision made for the future" [17]. This has implications for intercultural leaders especially when it comes to decision making in multicultural settings because their ability to foresee the consequences of their decisions and examine the past, present and future increases their likelihood of being successful. Servant leadership foster inclusivity, resulting in a sense of belongingness among workmates [71]. Inclusion benefits all stakeholders and generates a fruitful output for the organization. These selfless behaviours of servant leaders can motivate employees to perform better [49]. Despite the benefits that multicultural team brings, the cultural differences of team members can be an obstacle to the collaborative gains of team synergy [72]. This is because culturally diverse teams can bring about conflict and reduce social integration, preventing team members from coordinating their efforts. However, servant leaders are able to promote the well-being of their employees through autonomous motivation. Autonomous motivation refers to a type of self-regulation that sustains one's well-being by allowing personal values to facilitate one's work behaviours across cultures [23]. Given the fact that cultural differences can reduce the performance innovative output of multicultural teams, it is important for such teams to possess certain characteristics that reduce this problem and allow members from diverse cultures to work together effectively to maximize their performance [6, 73]. Even though cultural diversity influences the performance of employees in many ways, servant leaders are able to focus on the need to understand and strategize their approach regarding delegation of authority, accountability, relationships, privacy and time management [50]. Servant leaders usually exhibit excellent qualities such as caring, motivation, consideration, and conscientiousness which positively impact their employees to imitate [40]. Trust is another essential component for all kinds of organizations to work smoothly. Trust atmosphere is created when the leaders show commitment in their actions and reactions and this plays a pivotal role in achieving success for organizations. If the task in teams produces an atmosphere of mistrust, anxiety and threat it damages the process of creativity and innovation [74]. This danger is more likely to occur in multicultural teams, and in very diverse international contexts such as Europe and Asia [75]. According to Khan, Mubarik and Islam (2021), trust is the essence of servant leadership [76]. Greenleaf (2003) also asserts that trust and respect are high and accepted ethics that gives strength to all organizational members. Conceptualization is another prime leadership talent that servant leaders possess [23]. They employ wisdom to enable them observe and anticipate the consequences of people's actions, thereby

encouraging their followers to exhibit positive attitudes for positive outcomes. This means that servant leaders are visionary and are able to think beyond the day-to-day for their organization [17]. We therefore make this proposition that:

Proposition 4: *Servant leadership moderates the positive relationship between multicultural team work and team learning enhancement.*

We draw from the servant leadership characteristics espoused, and deduce that servant leaders are able to foster collaboration by building stronger teams and instilling harmony leading to productive behaviors among teammates. This enhances a positive working environment where team interactions are more constructive with reduced competition and selfish squabbles. As the servant leader supports and encourages his team members in the learning and development process, their personal and professional development is aligned with holistic goals and objectives of the organization. This alignment harnesses employee commitment to the organization which ultimately enhances productivity and profitability. Further, the support and encouragement that servant leaders give to their team members makes the more flexible and adaptable in the face of any changing environment. Finally, employees who work alongside servant leaders, learn to take responsibility and accelerate their leadership capabilities. As a result of this empowerment, employee commitment and loyalty is likely to increase as turnover rates reduce.

Even though the servant leadership concept presents with many benefits, there are some limitations and criticisms. Other researchers view the servant leadership concept as unrealistic and stressful [77, 78]. The servant leadership initiative can be time-consuming for leaders as it requires extra effort and hard work which can sometimes be a daunting and difficult task to achieve. As such servant leaders may be perceived as being weak and this is likely to diminish their formal authority. Further, the servant leadership dimension of empowering is not likely to be endorsed in the Asian societies because most of the Asian societies are high on the power distance dimension and therefore respect for status and hierarchy are paramount [79].

3. Materials and Methods

We focused on gaining an in-depth insight into the servant leadership research domain which has now received more recognition in management literature. We had quite a difficult challenge finding adequate research regarding servant-leadership in multicultural settings. Much of the research on servant-leadership in different cultures is not too profound. Most research articles tend to be duplications of other research with slight variations. We therefore identified both antecedents and outcomes of servant leadership within the existing research body [77]. We then tried to synthesize and develop a comprehensive servant leadership model that will provide explanations for practicing servant leadership by global leaders.

In our search methodology, we exercised due diligence to select academic research for review in this paper by following the recommended 7-step approach [80]. In the first step (i.e. bibliographic database or journals selection) we selected three major reference databases of academic literature (Scopus, Google scholar and Web of Science). Out of these three, Scopus covers a more expanded and superior spectrum of journals with a faster and broader citation analysis [77, 81]. In the second step (i.e. keywords search), the keyword search criteria and query were defined, based on the keywords we used to address the concept of "servant leadership" (the focus of this research). Commonly used keywords in literature, which we also employed in this paper, were made up of: *servant leadership, servant leader, service leadership and servant behaviour* [14]. In a bid to derive a more comprehensive definition to obtain comprehensive sample on the topic, we loosened the search criteria to "*servant leader"* and "*service leader*" to include both "*servant leadership"* and *"servant leader*" [14]. The other key terms: *"team learning",* and *"multicultural teams"* were also defined on the basis of commonly used keywords in the literature to identify research relevant in this study.

In the third step we reviewed selected abstracts to ascertain their relevance and confirm their inclusion in this paper. In the fourth step we applied the criteria for inclusion and exclusion of studies. For inclusion selected papers had to be (i) relevant to the main research question captured in the title, (ii) contain empirical evidence and (iii) its findings must be generalizable. Papers were excluded based on the following: (i) not written in English, (ii) Paper is not peer-reviewed (for example master's thesis), (iii) Paper is not related to the main research question captured in the title (iv) Paper is duplicated. The fifth step involved a full-text review of selected papers followed by backward search and forward search in retrieved papers in the sixth and seventh steps respectively. The backward search is a process of reviewing the literature cited in the articles yielded from the keyword search [82, 83]. Forward search is a process of reviewing additional sources that have cited the retrieved articles. This means that we identify additional papers through the bibliography of the collected papers to generate and identify newer papers, and identify authors who had written important papers published in relevant conferences.

4. Results & Analysis

This systematic query yielded a total of 78 results after using an inclusion and exclusion criteria, as follows: Servant leadership – 54; Team learning – 8; Multicultural teams – 16. This study's scope was limited to research published in international peer-reviewed journals from 2000 to 2022 which included the key terms in the title and the abstract. This study sought to analyse the influence of servant leadership on building capacities for team learning in multicultural teams. All the information that was extracted for evaluating servant leadership characteristics, themes and concepts as well as team learning in multicultural settings are summarised into matrixes (see Table 1) to clearly present the analysis for the proposed relationships. Table 1 shows the research papers describing servant leadership in terms of theoretical and practical viewpoints. We focused on proposition development of servant leadership in light of team learning in multicultural contexts. Some studies were conducted in the Western context, while other recent studies focused on the Asian context.

Table 1. Selected prior research on Servant Leadership, Team Learning & Multicultural Teams used to derive propositions.

AUTHOR(S) /YEAR	RESEARCH THEMES & CONCEPTS OF STUDY	METHODOLOGY	KEY FINDINGS (proposed relationships)
Jaiwant, Gowda & Kureethara, (2022).	Servant Leadership, Diversity, Ethnic and Cultural Diversity.	Comparative Analysis	
Dutta, S., & Khatri, P. (2017).	Servant leadership and positive organizational behaviour, Reducing employee turnover.	Explorative Study	
Gotsis, G., & Grimani, K. (2016)	Servant leadership in fostering inclusive organizations.	Theoretical integrative framework	
Spears & Lawrence, 2016	Practicing servant-leadership: trust, bravery, and forgiveness. Idealistic vision of the servant as leader.	Collection of Essays	*Servant leadership is positively related to the performance and effectiveness of multicultural teams.*
Zou, Tian, & Liu, (2015)	Servant leadership, social exchange relationships, and follower's helping behaviour.	Quantitative: moderated mediation analysis	
Whitfield (2014)	Servant leadership with Cultural dimensions in cross-cultural setting, Cultural diversity, Ethnic diversity	Review & Synthesis	
Hannay, (2008).	The Cross-Cultural Leader: The Application of Servant Leadership.	Meta-analysis	

AUTHOR(S) /YEAR	RESEARCH THEMES & CONCEPTS OF STUDY	METHODOLOGY	KEY FINDINGS (proposed relationships)
Barbuto & Wheeler (2006)	Servant leadership Behaviour attributes: empathy, emotional healing, persuasive mapping, etc	Scale development and construct clarification	
Greenleaf 2002).	Servant Leadership Characteristics & Cultural dimensions.		
Alfoqahaa, & Jones, (2020)	Qualities of leadership for cultural diversity, team cohesion and conflict resolution.	Qualitative Study	
Lee, Lyubovnikova, Tian & Knight, (2020)	Servant leadership: A meta‐analytic examination of incremental contribution, moderation, and mediation	Meta-analysis	
Jit, Sharma & Kawatra, (2017)	Healing a broken spirit: Role of servant leadership	Qualitative Study	*Servant leadership is positively related to effective team learning*
Chen et al., (2015)	A multilevel model of servant leadership, individual self-identity, group competition climate, and customer service performance.	Quantitative Study	
Schaubroeck et al., (2011)	Cognition-based and affect-based trust as mediators of leader behaviour influences on team performance.	Quantitative Study	
Hu & Liden, (2011)	Antecedents of team potency and team effectiveness: An examination of goal and process clarity and servant leadership	Quantitative Study	
Nam & Kannan, 2020	Digital environment in global markets: cross-cultural implications for evolving customer journeys.	Observational Studies	
Boone et al., (2019)	Top management team nationality diversity, corporate entrepreneurship, and innovation in multinational firms.	Quantitative Study	
Lifintsev & Wellbrock, (2019)	Cross-cultural communication in the digital age.	Quantitative Study	*Multicultural team work is positively related to team learning enhancement.*
Bouncken et al., 2016	Multi-cultural teams as sources for creativity and innovation: The role of cultural diversity on team performance.	Longitudinal Qualitative Study	
Hakimian et al., 2016	Importance of commitment in encouraging employees' innovative behaviour	Quantitative Study	
Hong, & Vai, (2008).	Knowledge-sharing in cross-functional virtual teams.	Qualitative Case Study	
Hinds & Weisband, 2003	Knowledge sharing and shared understanding in virtual teams. Creating conditions for virtual team effectiveness	Conceptual Paper	
Li et al., (2021)	Servant leadership and service innovation.	Quantitative: Moderated mediation Analysis	
Khan, Mubarik & Islam (2021)	Servant leadership, trust. and innovative work behaviour.	Quantitative Mediation Analysis	
Canavesi, A., & Minelli, E. (2021).	Servant leadership: A systematic literature review and network analysis.	Literature Review	*Servant leadership moderates the positive relationship between multicultural team work and team learning enhancement.*
Qiu, S., Dooley, L. M., & Xie, L. (2020).	How servant leadership and self-efficacy interact to affect service quality.	Quantitative; polynomial regression equation	
Sun, Liden, & Ouyang, (2019)	Are servant leaders appreciated? An investigation of how relational attributions influence employee feelings of gratitude and prosocial behaviours.	Quantitative: moderated mediation Analysis	
Brown, J. M. (2019)	Servant Leadership towards Cultural Competency	Mixed Methods	

AUTHOR(S) /YEAR	RESEARCH THEMES & CONCEPTS OF STUDY	METHODOLOGY	KEY FINDINGS (proposed relationships)
	and Critical Thinking		
Williams et al., (2017).	Servant leadership and followership creativity, Workplace spirituality and Political skill.	Quantitative	
Ling et al., 2016	The trickle-down effect of servant leadership on frontline employee service behaviours and performance.	Quantitative: hierarchical linear modeling	
Liden et al., (2014)	Servant leadership and serving culture: Influence on individual and unit performance.	Quantitative	
Greenleaf, 2002	*The servant-leader within: A transformative path.*	Collection of Essays	

Source: Scopus: https://www.scopus.com; Google scholar: https://scholar.google.com; Web of Science: https://www.webofscience.com

5. Discussion

The discussions and conclusions were based on the themes and concepts extracted from the different studies in different contexts. Findings in this research provide robust support for the motivational effects of the servant leadership theory across the globe. Even though some research suggests that displaying servant leadership traits may cause leaders to feel stressed [77, 78], Servant-leadership potentially offers concepts and ways of thinking that are plausible as a pathway to leveraging and navigating cultural differences in multicultural work settings. Servant leaders are able create a positive and collaborative atmosphere that allows team members to enjoy being listened to, understood, guided, valued, and esteemed [55]. This paper responds to the exigencies for global leadership and proposes that the servant-leadership characteristics may offer improved ways of leading more globally and inter-culturally through enhanced communication, building inclusive cultures and avoiding failure, depending on the type of culture. Due to the differences in cultures, multicultural team members working together may vary in their communicative behaviors which can pose challenges to effectively understand each other. By embracing and internalizing the content of servant-leadership global leaders will potentially have a stronger capacity to minimize or avoid conflicts which often lead to failure. As the collaborative working process is slowed down through conflicts that arise out of different cultural backgrounds of team members, global leaders must carefully plan the start of any multicultural based project. Enough time should be spent on team members getting to know each other, especially when team members lack intercultural experiences. Also, resources and time can be invested for informal interactions among team members which will enhance group cohesiveness in a positive way. Overcoming conflicts in teams can result in the acquisition of better intercultural competency which can easily be transferred to other situations in other global contexts.

Although there are promising behavioural, attitudinal and performance outcomes that servant leadership can bring on followers, some previous research suggests that displaying servant leadership traits may cause leaders to feel stressed [77, 78]. We therefore recommend that organizations could offer ample care and support to leaders when encouraging them to become servant leaders. Scholars also need to examine the potential drawbacks of servant leadership, and identify the best contexts where it can be implemented. For example, servant leadership dimensions of humility and empathy are more highly endorsed in Asian cultures than European cultures [79]. Again, the servant leadership approach is likely to be more effective in contexts characterized by a high degree of uncertainty where leaders struggle to make decisions and therefore need the proactive and motivational orientation of all employees, which Eva et al., (2019), identify as important antecedents for positive follower outcomes [77]. In this regard, managers could also consider the promotion and development of specific "servant leader" characteristics in employees to enhance an organizational climate of empowerment and support for employees. While the servant leader is more concerned with individuals, the transformational leader is more concerned with the entire organization. According to Stone, Russell and Patterson (2004) both servant and transformational leadership are people-oriented leadership styles with common characteristics such as vision, trust, integrity, respect, influence, delegation and modelling. However, one essential element differentiates the two theories. "While transformational leaders and servant-leaders both show concern for their followers, the overriding focus of the servant-leader is upon service to individual followers. The transformational leader has a greater concern for getting followers to engage in and support organizational objectives" [21]. The focus of the transformational leader is therefore to empower followers toward the organizational objectives, while the servant leader is people-oriented and more focused on the needs of those around them. They value human equality and seek to enhance the personal development as well as the

professional contributions of all organizational members. Embracing diversity and inclusion in organizations fosters a culture where all feel recognized and cherished. Servant leaders are able to inculcate this culture because they drive the action of their followers and are responsible for bringing about positive change in the organization. Adopting the servant leadership style can help to build a culture of belongingness, commitment and empowerment for team members in multicultural working environments to contribute their best for their organizations.

6. Conclusion

This paper highlights the importance and strength of the servant-leadership characteristics projecting it as a suitable leadership style for global leaders in this fast shrinking communication and physical boundaries of business organizations. As organizations are now working across their original geographical borders, they face ethnic and cultural variations. Having established that servant leaders demonstrate an inclusive mind-set and have the ability to maintain and progress harmony in ethnic and cultural diversity, we propose that servant leadership is essential for the modern workplace which has to embrace individuals from different ethnicities and cultural backgrounds. Again, servant leaders demonstrate the ability to influence team performance by creating a positive and collaborative atmosphere that allows the team to enjoy being listened to, understood, guided, valued, and esteemed. Further, servant leaders also demonstrate a strong developmental support which improves the task performance of employees by enhancing their abilities to learn new pathways and meet their objectives effectively. This shows that servant leaders are positively associated with individual and team performance. Finally, having shown that trust is the essence of servant leadership, servant leaders show commitment in their actions and reactions and this plays a pivotal role in eliminating an atmosphere of mistrust, anxiety and threat that can damage the process of creativity and innovation, especially multicultural teams and diverse international contexts. Since cultural diversity influences individuals' performance in a positive way, leaders are advised to adopt the servant leadership style and equip themselves with relevant knowledge for managing diverse workplaces that will improve leading supervisory roles.

Abbreviations

GL	Global Leadership
SL	Servant Leadership
TL	Team Learning
CD	Cultural Diversity
MT	Multicultural Teams

Author Contributions

Mercy Asaa Asiedu: Conceptualization, Resources, Supervision, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Project administration.

Jesse Kwaku Doe: Methodology, Formal Analysis, Investigation, Writing – review & editing.

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The data supporting the outcome of this research work has been reported in this manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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