Socrates and Leadership

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ABSTRACT
In this paper, the question of Socrates’ contribution to leadership has been investigated. The question of the importance of the ideas and beliefs of ancient philosophers, especially Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, the three giants of the human spirit, to contemporary life is always in the mind of people of modern society. Are Socrates’ beliefs still alive? The opinion of CEOs and academics has been used to explore the answer to the abovementioned question. Moreover, the use of Socrates’ method in leadership is exploited.

Keywords: Leadership, management, philosophy, Socratic questioning.

1. Introduction
I have been dealing with Socrates for a few years, studying mainly Plato’s dialogues. In the beginning, when I realized that the impact of Socrates’ “teachings” was great in many different scientific areas, I was very surprised, so I went deeper and deeper into this investigation. I very soon realized that the Socratic method, or Socratic questioning, was a key point in many different areas, from Education through Philosophy for Children (P4C) to Philosophical Counseling. So, I decided to study it further. During the coronavirus quarantine (first and second), I started looking at literature on Leadership due to different approaches to people’s health protection from various leaders in the world. Spontaneously, I checked on the Web about the connection between Socrates’ “teachings” and leadership. The questions I had in my mind were, “Is there any connection between Socrates and leadership?” and “What is this connection if there exists?”. The results were amazing!

Google engine gave me around 18.900.000 pages (in 0.46 seconds) on the first question! This is an amazing number. So, had I gone through all those pages to get an idea of how different people connect Socrates with Leadership? The answer is “No” because the main idea behind Socrates’ referencing for Leadership is mainly on questioning, which is his most important contribution according to most of the authors. A second contribution of Socrates in leadership is in business ethics! I put teaching in quotes because, as Socrates himself mentioned, he did not teach anybody (e.g., Plato’s Apology, 19d8-10, 33a5-6, 33b4-5, 35d3-4). Socrates’ mission was to live, dealing with philosophy and, more particularly, examining himself and his co-citizens following the orders of gods (Plato’s Apology, 28e5-6). So, how does the proposal that he spent time on provide advice for leadership? In the following sections, I will refer to papers and books mentioning the reasons that the various authors think that Socrates contributed to leadership. Moreover, this study will be based on the opinions of both CEOs and academics working on leadership concepts.

2. CEOs Referring to Socrates’ Contribution to Leadership

2.1. Introduction
Susan Ward runs an IT consulting firm and designed and presented courses on how to promote small businesses (Ward, 2023). Reading her article about the definition of the term leadership, I understood that “the terms “leadership” and “management” tend to be used interchangeably” and that “leadership also involves communicating, inspiring and supervising”, that “anyone can learn to become a leader by improving particular skills”, and that “leadership capability falls along a bell curve”. So, I understood that leadership can be taught, and that requires specific traits.

Continuing searching, I read Kevin Kruse’s article in FORBES (Kruse, 2013). Kevin Kruse, CEO of LEADx, writes that seniority does not make somebody a leader or his/her position in the hierarchy of an organization (Kruse, 2013). So, leadership is not connected with titles, and it is quite different from management (Kruse, 2013). Usually, managers have the task of planning the work, measuring the performance, monitoring the way things...
happen, coordinating with superiors and inferiors, solving problems, hiring employees, firing employees, and many things like these. Finally, it is widely believed that managers manage things. On the other hand, Leaders lead people.

All the above led me to the conclusion that leaders are not managers and that they lead people. So, what are the needs of the people? Do they need a leader? Moreover, what skills does a person need to become a good leader? This is the point that Socrates emerges. We have started asking questions so our thoughts become more concrete. Socrates was asking questions continuously. That was his method. Roshan Thiran, founder and CEO of the Leaderonomics Group, writes that he has been led to Socrates by the writings of Benjamin Franklin, who is the person who led Thiran towards Socrates. In his autobiography, Benjamin Franklin advises us to obtain and follow 13 virtues. The last one is humility, and he mentions that we must imitate Jesus and Socrates. Thiran, in the first place, understood why Franklin mentions Jesus, but he is wondering why we should imitate Socrates. So, this question led him to study further about Socrates, and it was very surprising to him when he realized that the Greek philosopher said many things about life and leadership (Thiran, 2017). I understand that Socrates has much to say about life. That was the core of his philosophy, but has Socrates also much to say on leadership? What are the points on leadership that Socrates mentions in his “teaching”? Many people agree with Thiran’s statement that Socrates has been more influential to the next generations than any other historical figure worldwide (Thiran, 2017).

Thiran mentions Socrates’ parents’ jobs. His father was a stonemason, and his mother was a midwife! How symbolic are both of these jobs? A stonemason, a sculptor, is a person who deals with stone. Takes the raw stone and makes a building or takes the marble and makes a sculpture, an art product! As Socrates was doing with the young main citizens of Athens. He was accompanied by many young Athenians who were listening and discussing with him various intellectual issues. So, they were increasing their thinking ability and, consequently, their knowledge. On the other hand, his mother was a midwife. Socrates insisted that he was not able to teach anybody. However, he could make somebody recall knowledge that exists in our soul but in a latent state (Plato, *Meno*). So, he is somehow a midwife who helps the person to give birth to the knowledge that is hidden within him. It is significant that Socrates in Plato’s *Meno* 80c8 says that if the torpedo is torpid to itself as well as to others, then he is like a torpedo, but not otherwise. Because Socrates was not sure for himself, he also had doubts about the questions posed, so he did not cause doubts only to others; in particular, he was in more doubt than anyone else. That is another point that Socrates insisted that he did not know more than other people. However, he had the advantage that he knew that he did not know, whereas the others thought they knew what they finally proved that they did not know.

So, “aporein”, that is doubting, was not only the status of others but also his status. “Aporein” of Socrates and “aporia” of Aristotle, in my humble opinion, have been the core points of scientific research methodology. Modern research methodology steps on research questions, and this sets the path of the researcher’s attempt (Babbie et al., 2018, preface Sevaste’s Chatzifotiou, p. 23). According to Wikipedia, a *research question* is a question that a research project sets out to investigate (Wikipedia, 2023). Socrates understands Meno’s questions on how to search for something that we do not know is nature. More specifically, Meno asks Socrates in which way are we going to search for a thing of whose nature we do not know anything? Moreover, he says which one of those we do not know we will set as a target of our investigation. Or even assuming that we found it, how will we know that this is the thing we did not know (Plato & Lamb, 2007a, p. 299)? The abovementioned questions, the doubts, are part of the everyday life of a modern researcher (Tirole & Rendall, 2017, p. 69).

Going back to the argument of recollection and midwifery, we read in Plato that Socrates says to Meno that because the nature of all things is akin. The soul has learned everything. Nothing bothers the soul from the moment that will remember just one single thing—a process that we call learning—then can discover everything else if it is built with courage and will faint not during the process of searching (Plato & Lamb, 2007a, p. 303). So, Socrates concludes by saying that investigation and learning are a matter of recollection (Plato & Lamb, 2007a, p. 303). So, here we have a possible way of learning as it is explained in other dialogues as well via questioning. Thus, we go back to the central theme of this paper, which is the connection between Socrates and leadership. Thiran writes that Socrates, as it is presented mainly in Plato’s dialogues, started teaching humanity how important is mentorship and discipleship (Thiran, 2017).

Socrates’ appearance was not like the bodies we see in Greek statues. In contrast, he was short with a flat nose and ugly, not physically attractive. Moreover, he was walking around the streets of Athens without shoes and had long hair, whereas his personal hygiene was not the proper one for an Athenian. However, the influence and attractiveness of Socrates were due to his stoic character and also because he was a brilliant intellectual (Thiran, 2017). Socrates had taken part in three military campaigns as a soldier during the Peloponnesian War, as he mentions in Apology (28e2), where he showed great temperance, for example, Alcibiades describes in Plato’s Symposium (220–221). As Alcibiades narrates, Socrates in Delium was along with General Laches. Moreover, Socrates and Laches were running away as the troops were in a significant disorder (Plato & Lamb, 2007b, p. 237). However, according to Alcibiades, Socrates was braver than Laches (Plato & Lamb, 2007b, p. 237). So, Socrates was more collected than General Laches, who is considered the leader, whereas Socrates is the soldier. So, here we can see that a general, a combat leader, must have more abilities than only expertise in weapons. Socrates was fearless, and he has shown great courage. Thiran mentions that Socrates’ intellectual endeavor was not a lecturing way, but he used to ask questions to the noble and wealthy men of his times about wisdom, truth and virtues in general (Thiran, 2017). A very interesting dialogue of Plato is also *Laches*, which deals with the definition of temperance. In *Laches*, Socrates shows, according
to Plato, his intellectual abilities, which are greater than the two of his interlocutors, General Laches and Nikias, in a topic that, in our opinion, the opposite should happen, the question of the definition of temperance. So, here we ask a very simple question. How can a leader, a military leader in this case, lead a group without knowing the definition of such an important term, which means that he will not be able to apply it during the fight? Consequently, in our opinion, such a general will not be able to save his group, and this means that this person will not be a good leader. So, who is a good leader? What is leadership? What are the traits of a good leader?

Thiran writes that great leaders become great because they can see the truth in things, and they refuse to stop sharing it with the rest of the world (Thiran, 2017). So, yes, Socrates dealt with leadership! I will refer again to Thiran’s article in Section 3, where we discuss the traits that a good leader has to have. But, “What Socrates Can Teach Us About Leadership”? This is half of the title of the article by Lee Colan, co-founder of the L-Group. The second part of the title is “Use this Greek Philosopher’s method to boost your leadership” (Colan, 2016)! Thus, the Socratic method cannot only teach us leadership principles, but it can boost our leadership. Colan thinks that Socrates’ method is powerful. However, is Socrates, a philosopher who lived two thousand four hundred years before our era, still alive? The author believes that Socrates is still alive today and spurs in most highly effective leaders (Colan, 2016). His method of questioning is a universal and timely tool and can be used in leadership courses but also in engaging teams and providing for critical thinking, which is a topical question for our education system as well as our everyday lives. I think that we approach the reason that many people believe that Socrates has many things to say about leadership. The reason is mainly his method. Socrates’ method of questioning is a key point for leadership. Leaders have to ask questions. Colan advises future leaders that when we ask questions, we must be sure that we listen to the answer. Moreover, he suggests avoiding asking when we are not listening because otherwise, we build employees’ cynicism (Colan, 2016). He also adds that most effective leaders listen to around 50% of the time, and during the rest of the time, they ask questions (Colan, 2016). The type of leader who speaks all the time is a wrong model of a leader, according to Socrates and also many modern gurus of Leadership.

Cory Galbraith, CEO of Galbraith Communications, writes that during history, there is no other figure so intriguing as Socrates (Galbraith, 2014). Furthermore, he writes that the Greek Philosopher said many things that are very important and relevant to our lives today. He advises studying Socrates’ life and method to develop our leadership skills and apply his technique in our modern age (Galbraith, 2014). Galbraith believes strongly that Socrates is still alive and that he can advise us on leadership. Moreover, he gives seven crucial points for leaders from Socrates’ philosophy. One point is, as Galbraith writes that a leader or a departmental manager should emphasize instead the meaning behind the tasks that people do.

Moreover, they should help employees or colleagues understand that there is a greater purpose underneath these tasks that perhaps they look meaningless. He bases this point on Socrates’ belief that the important thing is not just living but living correctly (Galbraith, 2014). The second point is that following Socrates, who believed that he was the wisest man alive, for just one reason, because he knew that he knew nothing (Plato, Apology, 21d4-5), then leaders should admit that they do not know everything (Galbraith, 2014). According to Galbraith, the most influential leaders admit they do not know everything. They use the knowledge and experience of other people to get things done (Galbraith, 2014). A third point is that a good leader is a person who dares to remain at his post and not run away when the team fights against the enemy (Plato, Laches, 190e). Leaders have to face troubles because that way, they will seem smaller (Galbraith, 2014). When we do not handle a complex situation immediately, solving it becomes more challenging.

Thomas Metcalf (n.d.), an economist, stockbroker and technology salesman, started writing in 1997 and is the author of several books. Metcalf writes that the Socratic model is a novel method of leadership even today. Moreover, for him, the Socratic model is the most suitable method for cases where the work is project-based. Then, team leaders do not necessarily need to be supervisors but apply the Socratic method, which is ideal for helping team members go through the different steps of developing and formulating project objectives (Metcalf, n.d.). Furthermore, he writes that in collaborative processes, teams could use the Socratic method to uncover ideas that otherwise would be hidden and could go unnoticed when we apply a more hierarchical leadership style. Perhaps in a hierarchical, more authoritative and formal leadership style, subordinates would hesitate to answer questions or express ideas in their very first stages and need further development. In this way, the team loses fresh ideas and may lose new paths in developing the team and its products. Metcalf continues explaining the Socratic method and mentions that law and medicine students use this method as part of their training to think independently, make proper decisions, get confidence and understand the deeper issues to make the right calls (Metcalf, n.d.).

Bill Stainton is a many-time Emmy Award winner and Hall of Fame keynote speaker. His expertise is in Innovation, Creativity, and Breakthrough Thinking, and his main job is to help leaders and their teams put forward innovative solutions for their most challenging problems. In his article, he writes that the Socratic Method is a questioning technique with questions and answers that lead to the conclusion the questioner was targeting in the first place (Stainton, n.d.). Then, he adds that it is a critical skill for leaders to hold, and he mentions why this method is an excellent skill for leaders. Furthermore, he writes that leadership does not mean we have all the answers, but what is essential is to ask the right questions (Stainton, n.d.). Finally, Stainton advises leaders to use questions to direct the team to the objective set like Socrates, or leaders could keep their questions open-ended without having a preconceived idea of the “correct” answer. He further suggests that the “correct” answer depends on the
particular situation and the leader’s relationship with his team. He concludes that the principle is, in fact, similar, and in this way, your team is allowed to become co-creators of the reply to your problem (Stainton, n.d.).

Michael Lindenmayer, a purpose-driven entrepreneur, writer, systems designer, co-founder and CEO of Toilet Hackers, writes that building a successful venture means making good decisions constantly. So, the question now is how we can become great at making good decisions. He suggests that the answer is returning to Socrates (Lindenmayer, 2013). Automatically, a question arises, “What is so important with the figure of Socrates, especially in leadership”? Lindenmayer answers this question by saying that Socrates holds the key to a vital leadership skill: asking great questions (Lindenmayer, 2013). Thus, asking questions is an excellent skill for a leader. Moreover, he admits that cultures that welcome the method of questioning flourish, whereas those that are afraid of it either stop working or are limited to mediocrity (Lindenmayer, 2013). Therefore, it is essential not only for organizations to be built on enforcing questions but also for whole cultures.

Steven Robbins, founder and president of Leadership Decision Works, Inc., which is an American consulting firm that advises corporate companies to develop profound leadership and organizational strategies to continue their growth and productivity over time, writes reasons why questions are better than statements and then introduces Socratic Method (Robbins, 2004). According to Robbins, “commands invite rebellion or submission”. On the other hand, he writes that questions engage people (Robbins, 2004). Asking questions can have many consequences, like persuading an audience on a theme, aligning an organization to the correct path, setting directions for teams, or focusing on things that help people enhance their learning. So, he finds it more important to ask questions than use statements. Asking questions makes the subordinate participate in what will be decided because they will feel part of the decision-making team, so they are responsible for implementing the decision. He points out that instead of stating your arguments, you can make a series of questions which are chosen to lead your listeners to deduce the conclusion on their own. He compares questioning with lecturing, where the traditional lecturer delivers material to the audience, and the people who listen are pathetic. However, when we use questioning, this might take longer time, and we might realize that this questioning will take longer than lecturing, but what you will obtain is that you will save time in the end (Robbins, 2004). The critical issue with questioning is the participation of the interlocutor in the process. Thus, the subordinate participates experientially in the conclusions and the decisions. As Robbins mentions, your listeners will obtain their conclusion, which will be based on your questions (Robbins, 2004). Then, he adds that they will arrive at a conclusion they have reached much faster, whereas those that are afraid of it either stop working or are limited to mediocrity (Lindenmayer, 2013). Therefore, it is essential not only for organizations to be built on enforcing questions but also for whole cultures.

2.2. Did Socrates Know?

However, are we sure about the interlocutor’s route in answering our questions? Moreover, do we know, in all cases, the final point that we would like the interlocutor to arrive at? Was Socrates so sure of the answers of the slave boy in Meno? Socrates asked fifty questions to the boy in order for him to arrive at the answer. So, was Socrates aware of the answers to his questions?

Furthermore, did Socrates know? The latter is a question that experts disagree amongst themselves. The most probable is that he did not. In early Plato’s dialogues, he insists that he does not know anything (Apology, etc.,). Vlastos writes that based on the existing texts, no epistemological theory can be ascribed to Socrates (Vlastos, 1991, p. 15). However, other experts believe that Socrates knew at least some things. It is important to identify that Vlastos points out that Socrates had no epistemological theory, no pieces of knowledge! Thus, a good question is to clarify if Socrates had some knowledge or not and if yes, what was this knowledge?

In this paper, we will not consider the more fundamental question concerning Socrates: whether Plato’s Socrates is the historical Socrates or not. The latter is the well-known question of the “Socratic problem”, which is beyond the scope of our paper. So, we accept at least that Socrates of Plato’s early dialogues is to be considered the historical Socrates. Moreover, many of the experts on Socrates and Plato accept that in the middle and later dialogues of Plato, Socrates is a puppet of his. Socrates admits in Apology that he acquires human wisdom but does not clarify what this wisdom is. Socrates says that the fact is that he had acquired this reputation on account of nothing else than a sort of wisdom. So, he asks, what kind of wisdom is this? And he replies that it is perhaps human wisdom (Plato, Apology, 20d). Thus, Socrates had a kind of knowledge. Furthermore, Socrates says he might be wise in this wisdom, that is human wisdom. However, he continues saying that these men with whom he was speaking might be wise in some wisdom greater than humans, or he admits that he does not know what to say because he does not understand it and adds that whoever says he does, in Socrates opinion, is lying and speaking to arouse prejudice against me (Plato, Apology, 20d).

Gareth B. Mathews highlights the difference between Socratic Ignorance and Absolute Ignorance (Matthews, 2008, pp. 115–116). In his paper, Mathews writes that Socrates had some knowledge, saying that he used a confident and well-targeted way of questioning his interlocutors, which at least suggests that Socrates must have known part of what he was inquiring into, although he might not have known what he most wanted to know. Then, if Socrates knew why he did not want to reveal this knowledge from the beginning? Why was he asking questions? Julia Annas, in her book “Plato—A Very Short Introduction”, starts her syllogism on the detachment and authority of Plato, explaining first the possible reason that Plato wrote dialogues. She says that Plato is detaching himself, as the possessor of philosophical views, from the views of the characters he includes in his dialogues (Annas, 2003, p. 29).

Moreover, she advances her thought, saying that Plato’s works raise serious issues because he wanted to engage the reader with the dialogue. Moreover, that meant that the reader should be involved in doing philosophy, not just enjoying the drama (Annas, 2003, p. 29). So, Annas says
that Plato wanted us, and accordingly, Socrates wanted his interlocutors to participate in philosophical inquiry. Plato did not want us to be pathetic because he believed that with dialogues, the interlocutor and the reader take part in the inquiry. Plato would be great at writing philosophical essays to present his ideas; however, we believe he deliberately chose to write dialogues. The same applies to Socrates with the dialogic way of doing philosophy. He wanted his interlocutors to participate because he understood that existential learning is the most important. Existential learning is the most vivid process of learning. Our soul participates in it, and the knowledge it gets this way is permanent. This last argument is also important in using Socratic questioning in leadership. The leader has to make subordinates and followers participate in all organizational issues. So, the leader has to ask questions!

3. Socratic Questioning in Leadership

There are various papers on leadership mentioning Socrates and Socratic questioning in particular. In this section, a great deal of such papers will be presented. Lieutenant Colonel Aaron A. Tucker, USAF, in his paper titled “Leadership by the Socratic Method”, exalts Socrates saying that he instructed his followers through several carefully constructed questions prepared to force self-examination, as Socrates mentions in Apology, and also guide them to an acceptable conclusion (Tucker, 2007). So, Tucker first accepts that Socrates had students, which he does not accept. However, our modern idea of a teacher suits Socrates’ profile.

Moreover, Tucker asserts that Socrates instructed his students through many “carefully constructed questions”! The second point of Tucker that Socrates had several carefully constructed questions supposes that Socrates knew the arrival point of the discussion. However, Socrates insists that he did not know and was working with his interlocutors to this end. According to Tucker, the Socrates method is invaluable for leaders applying it to many cases to influence and persuade for implanting critical thinking skills. Additionally, Tucker writes that contemporary leaders have many different roles, such as instructors, mentors, leaders, followers, and peers. For each of these roles, the Socratic method can be ideally used. Thus, Tucker believes the Socratic method is essential for contemporary leaders.

In their paper, Tienken et al. (2009) refer to the use of questions within classes from teachers and tutors. They write in particular that Socrates in Republic posed several questions to Glaucon on purpose to help him reflect and think critically regarding the subject and gradually come to a new comprehension of the notion of justice. Moreover, the authors add that this method of questioning is known as the Socratic Method. According to the authors, questioning perhaps is the most often used instructional intervention by teachers (Tienken et al., 2009). Their study and other studies mention that teachers do not obtain the best of questioning’s potential. So, they suggest teachers use more productive questions. Moreover, they suggest that school leaders should foster that practice. In addition, they mention that some professions, like law, are built on strategic questioning, so they propose to their teachers to ask more quality questions (Tienken et al., 2009).

Richard Paul, a significant leader in the international critical thinking movement, and Linda Elder, an educational psychologist who has taught both psychology and critical thinking at the college level, write in their initial statement that it is not easy to think of somebody having good critical thinking skills while lacking the ability to question profoundly (Paul & Elder, 2019, p. 5). Moreover, they add that it is also not easy to think of somebody acquiring the mentality to question in a better way than Socrates. They conclude that it is a natural ending to arrive at Socrates looking for more profound critical thinking skills; in particular, they write that it is concluding that those who are truthfully interested in deepening their critical thinking skills will automatically be interested in acquiring the art of profoundly questioning. Thus, learning the Socratic art is a natural place to start (Paul & Elder, 2019, p. 5). A question that arises when dealing with Socratic questioning is the difference between a usual discussion and a dialogue using questions and answers. Paul and Elder write that Socratic questioning is systematic, disciplined, and profound, so it is different from the usual discussions amongst people and mainly focuses on foundation concepts, principles and theories, issues or problems (Paul & Elder, 2019, p. 10). I would like to make a parenthesis here to point out the admiration of Dr Elder and Dr Richard towards Socrates, referring to him in their Introduction, page 10, ten times (Socrates, Socratic questioning, Socratic questions, Socratic dialogue). Then, in their attempt to connect Socratic questioning with critical thinking, they mention that the art of Socratic questioning is closely joined with critical thinking because the art of questioning is essential to improve our thought and obtain its excellence (Paul & Elder, 2019, p. 11). In addition, they write that the word “Socratic” puts to the art of questioning a systematic, deepening, and lasting interest in obtaining the truth or plausibility of things. So, they believe that interlocutors, during the questioning and answering procedure, are trying to understand more profound concepts, ideas, and so on.

Paul and Elder (2019) also try to follow profound argumentation and distill the truthfulness of the arguments in close comparison with logic. They think that leadership is embodied in Socratic Questioning because the rules they consider include a person who is the leader of the discussion. This person directs the discussion by asking systematic and disciplined questions, and everyone participates, helping to go beneath the surface of what is being discussed (Paul & Elder, 2019, p. 83). At a point, they make an excellent comparison of the discussion leader with an intellectual Orchestra leader, saying that the leader of the discussion must be sure that melody and not cacophony results!

In her paper, Susanne Ollila investigates reflection in project management and leadership (Ollila, 2000). She asks what type of leadership is needed to contribute to the success of project management, which is a very complex task. Also, she asks what type of contribution the leaders need to get along with the execution of their assignment (Ollila, 2000). In Ollila’s view, contemplative leadership
refers to leaders contemplating their leadership behaviour concerning their understanding of how it acts on the behaviour of others (Ollila, 2000). Ollila points out that learning is vital to building organizational success and innovation. However, in her opinion, learning is not a part of everyday work in organizations, although it has been identified as a critical performance indicator for successful R&D projects (Ollila, 2000). She mentions Argyris and Schön (1974), who claim that old theories block learning. So, the solution to the abovementioned problem is the questioning of governing settings, putting in doubt the whole system of theories in use, and then searching for knowledge and reflection. She continues by referring to a case study about the reflection on the actions of a project leader over six months. In the beginning, she was just observing this person. Then, in the second stage, they had reflection meetings where she asked him questions about his actions. So, he had to explain his sayings and actions. At this stage, he found difficulties understanding his behavior, and he was focused on others’ behavior. So, questions helped him reflect on the situation, and finally, he realized the difference between what he thought he was doing and what he was doing. Moreover, as Ollila reports, he used an inquiry approach when talking to his colleagues (Ollila, 2000). Finally, Ollila mentions Socrates and the advantages of his method, and she admits that her way was similar to a Socratic dialogue.

John Ed. D. Sherlock and Grant Morgan describe using provocative statements as a leadership assignment to encourage critical thinking (Sherlock & Morgan, 2009). They state that the provocative statement assignment embodies usual elements from accustomed practices of Socratic questioning, debate, argumentation analysis, and rhetoric. So, once more, Socratic questioning is engaged in leadership, specifically leadership education. Nevertheless, why critical thinking is so important in leadership? The authors argue that depending on traditional logic to acquire the best choice among various options is usually impossible due to the enigmatic nature of the business context in modern business. So, leaders make decisions based on persuasion rather than truthfulness. Thus, persuasion skills are necessary for leaders and in leadership education.

Critical thinking is an essential skill for leaders to make their decisions accurately. Then, the next question is how and when leadership students can be introduced to critical thinking and with which method. Sherlock and Morgan propose using provocative statement assignments during leadership education because they consider it an effective tool for developing critical thinking and persuasive communication skills (Sherlock & Morgan, 2009). Their theoretical framework for provocative statement assignments is drawn from the literature on (a) debate, (b) Socratic questioning, (c) argumentation, and (d) rhetoric. As they mention, Socratic questioning was used originally by the Greek philosopher Socrates, and this technique has been used to promote higher-order thinking within classrooms since his teachings (Sherlock & Morgan, 2009). Socrates examined concerning its truthfulness. Then, his interlocutor gave the second definition, Socrates usually rejecting it, and so on. Plato’s early writings were aporetic, meaning that the discussion was not arriving at a final definition of the concept. However, the benefit of such spiritual exercise is crucial to developing the mind. Socratic questioning refreshes students’ minds by frequently examining the subject with thought-vitalizing questions (Sherlock & Morgan, 2009). Finally, they point out that the explorative essence of Socratic dialogue combined with the stress on stimulating critical thinking is proven more successful than the traditional feedback given by an instructor (Sherlock & Morgan, 2009).

The Dutch consultant and philosopher Hans Bolten writes that there is a considerable contrast between a discussion and a Socratic-type dialogue (Bolten, 2001). He also notices that the impulse of the interlocutors is to convince, whereas the elementary target of the participants in a dialogue is to explore. Bolten reports in his paper how Socratic dialogue has assisted managers in developing ethical abilities and responsibility (Bolten, 2001). He points out that a Socratic dialogue often helps develop an open conversational attitude where everybody will not feel confused like Meno in its homonymous Plato’s dialogue (Bolten, 2001). As Bolten mentions, a Socratic dialogue is a conversation in which a philosophical inquiry is conducted.

Moreover, he admits that his Socratic Method is based on Leonard Nelson’s work. Leonard Nelson developed his Socratic Method for educational purposes (Nelson, 1949). According to Nelson, only Plato, from subsequent philosophy, adhered to Socrates’ method, although he advanced it, and his results went quite further than his teacher’s. Plato kept even the imperfections of the method because he could not overcome these defects (Nelson, 1949). A Socratic dialogue is an exchange of thoughts to uncover the answer to a specific question (Bolten, 2001). Nelson reminds Plato’s argument that written words are used to remind the person who knows the subject about which they are written (Nelson, 1949; Plato & Fowler, 2007, p. 565). Thus, once again, dialogue is advocated instead of written work (Nelson, 1949). According to Plato, when we are aware of the issue under investigation, we can use books, essays, and notes for revision. However, when we investigate an issue and look for new ideas and ways to overcome it in business, we need dialogue to listen to others’ ideas and thoughts. So, even if we believe in how to deal with it, this will give us a more precise overview, and our subordinates will participate in the formation of further activities. Bolten used Socratic dialogue with six bank managers to whom the same question was set up. So, Hans Bolten reports in his paper on how Socratic dialogue has assisted managers in developing ethical abilities and responsibility. Concluding research done with members of a dialogue team, he concludes that organizations that are aware of ethics cannot depend on abstract virtuous codes and rules. He argues that organizations need Socratic dialogue as a tool for the managers to form ethical guidelines, then both managers and employees establish an agreement and apply it in reality.
Moreover, he shows how dialogue can encourage managers to be ready to describe their actions. This readiness has to be implicit in the notion of the ethical action itself. Thus, Socratic dialogue can build organizations on a way of life in which morally responsible action is the basic rule, not the irregularity, and in which the responsibility to give an account of somebody's actions has its rightful place.

To conclude, David C. Bauman writes that business ethics and leadership literature has disregarded the analysis of virtue in the Socratic dialogues. However, Plato's description of virtue and persuasion gives applicable perceptions to business leaders (Bauman, 2018).

Finally, many papers connecting Socratic questioning and thinking are beyond this paper's scope.

4. Conclusion

In this paper, the contribution of Socrates to leadership has been investigated. It is more than a reality that many scientists and artists are looking to the past for inspiration, so the ideas and beliefs of ancient philosophers, especially Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, the three giants of the human spirit, are a good ground for this purpose. So, the question under investigation was if Socrates' beliefs are still alive. To build our argument, the opinion of CEOs and academics has been used to explore the abovementioned question.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares that he does not have any conflict of interest.

References


