

Analogies between Gardening and Organizational Leadership

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Analogies and metaphors are powerful ways to create understanding and to reduce the complexity of organizational leadership through focusing on the most important aspects only. The focus of the organization-as-garden metaphor is the growth of the individual. The garden is an ideal image for an organization, which follows the servant leadership concept, as this concept is unique in its focus on the growth of the individuals in the organization. The analogies show the close connection between gardening and organizational servant leadership, and provide new insights from gardening for the practice of organizational servant leadership. For example, for an organization to grow, servant leaders can learn from the banyan tree to grow deeper and wider, from the tabonuco tree to actively foster collaboration, from the vine to cut projects, which bear no fruits, and from the gardener to take time to relax and enjoy the growth, which God had granted. Servant leaders are challenged to integrate these analogies and the organization-as-garden metaphor in their organizational communication to support their organizational servant leadership concept.

The word *analogy* comes from the Greek word *analogia* meaning *proportion*. An analogy is to say that part of – or an aspect of – “A” resembles “B”, for example, that gardening resembles leading an organization. In this study several analogies between gardening and organizational leadership will be derived from studying the garden metaphor for organization. The word *metaphor* comes from the Greek word *metapherein*, which means *to transfer*. A metaphor is to say that “A” is “B”, where “B” enhances the meaning associated with “A”, for instance, an organization (A) is a garden (B). While analogy and metaphor are similar, they are distinct in that an analogy is aspectual, whereas a metaphor is holistic. Analogies between gardening and organizational leadership focus on the specific aspects of leadership in the garden metaphor for organization. In organization theory, researchers study metaphors for organization mainly for three reasons:

1. to gain new understanding about the complex system called “organization” (e.g., (Morgan, 2006)),
2. to explore those parts or aspects of the metaphor where the metaphor does not seem to work, in order to develop new creative solutions for organizational challenges (e.g., (Oswick *et al.*, 2002)), and
3. to learn about the paradigm of those applying the metaphor, because different metaphors reflect different world views of an organization (e.g., (Amernic *et al.*, 2007), and (Oberlechner & Mayer-Schoenberger, 2002)).

Analogies and metaphors are powerful concepts in organization theory. A study of the organization-as-garden metaphor, with garden as the source domain (see Appendix A) and organization as the target domain shall reveal new understanding of organizational leadership.

Metaphors for Organizations

Twenty years after Morgan first published his classical book *Images of Organization* about the use of metaphors in organizational management, he observes an enormously increased interest in the role, which metaphors play in understanding and managing organizations (p. xi). New metaphors have been developed, which are based on insights from complexity and chaos science. Metaphors always produce a kind of one-sided insight. Each metaphor implies a certain way of thinking and a way of seeing and – as powerful as it might be in shaping an organization’s life – it will always be incomplete, biased, and potentially misleading. “The challenge is to become skilled in the art of using metaphor: to find fresh ways of seeing, understanding, and shaping the situations that we want to organize and manage” ((Morgan, 2006), p. 5).

This study focuses on the similarities between gardening and organizational leadership. The overall goal is the same as Morgan’s: “To show how we can use the creative insights generated by metaphor to create new ways of understanding organization” (Morgan 2006, p. 367).

Organizational leadership is a complex domain. There exists not even a mutually agreed upon or commonly accepted understanding of leadership in organizations as Yukl notes ((Yukl, 2006), p.20): “After a comprehensive review of the leadership literature, Stogdill concluded already in 1974 that “there are almost as many definitions of leadership as there are persons who have attempted to define the concept”. Yukl further concludes, that the stream of new definitions has continued unabated until today. One of the newer definitions for organizational leadership comes from (Winston & Patterson, 2006). The authors researched the leadership literature in an attempt to review the existing definitions of leadership, and to develop a definition of leadership, which would cover all the different aspects of leadership. They researched more than 280 references. “The study uncovered over 90 variables that may comprise the whole of leadership” ((Winston & Patterson, 2006), p. 1). Based on these 90 variables, they develop a comprehensive integrative definition of leadership, which is over 650 words long, and shows the enormous spectrum of organizational leadership.

Metaphors are particular helpful in creating better understanding and new insights of such complex domains like organization and leadership. No single metaphor can capture the total nature of organizational life. Different metaphors provide different insights in the target domain, and can

constitute and capture the nature of organizational life in different ways, each generating powerful, distinctive but essentially partial kinds of insight. (Morgan, 2006) presents some of the well-explored metaphors like organization as machine, as organism, as brain, as culture, as political system, as psychic prison, as flux and transformation, and as instrument of domination. Metaphors are not only helpful in understanding organizational life; they are also being applied to influence the people in the organization. The leadership's choice and usage of metaphors in the organization often reflect a certain paradigm and worldview. By studying the metaphors, which the leadership of an organization uses, people can get an idea of the inherent worldview and paradigm of the organizational leadership. "Metaphors are indicative of a leader's thinking and form a foundation for his or her actions. Leadership metaphors create leadership reality by defining such important aspects as the leader's role and the context in which leadership takes place" ((Oberlechner & Mayer-Schoenberger, 2002), p. 161). In (Oberlechner & Mayer-Schoenberger, 2002) the authors explore specifically the relationship between leadership and the use of metaphors. They compare four common metaphors war, machine, play, and "spiritual experience" based on a number of what they call leadership dimensions, for example, metaphor focus, role of leader, role of group, and change dynamics. „Many of these metaphors revolve around defined themes which play a central part in various conceptualizations of leadership. To be aware of some of these frequent metaphorical themes helps one to better understand some of the common conceptualizations of leadership" (p. 162).

In a research study on metaphors-in-use (Cornelissen *et al.*, 2005) evaluated the management literature over a ten year period from 1993 to 2003 based on the occurrences of ten conceptual metaphors for "organization": machine, animate being, culture, warfare, system, linkage, family, symbolism, space, and architecture. According to their research, "machine" and "animate being" are the predominant metaphorical categories in the surveyed literature.

How leaders use metaphors to influence the organization and even the public shows the example of Jack Welch. Jack Welch, the longstanding CEO of *General Electric*, is one of the world's most successful transformational leaders. In a recent article (Amernic *et al.*, 2007) evaluate Jack Welch's annual letters to the stockholders in his years as CEO from 1981-2000 according to the kind of leadership metaphors which he used. The five root metaphors are the leader as pedagogue, who knows what is right and what is wrong, the leader as a physician, who is capable of diagnosing health and prescribing remedies, the leader as an architect, commander, and saint. In the discussion of their findings, the authors contend, "the metaphorical constructs employed in Welch's letters, and the overall tone of certainty they often employ about issues that are objectively *uncertain*, seem intended to produce conformity with a centrally ordained corporate direction" (p. 1863).

The Garden Metaphor

The organization-as-garden metaphor has gained more attention in the last years. The subtitle of an interview with Peter Senge published by the *Fast Company* (Senge, 1999) reads: "Ten years ago,

Peter Senge introduced the idea of the "learning organization." Now he says that for big companies to change, we need to stop thinking like mechanics and to start acting like gardeners." In this interview, Peter Senge responds to the question "what is the deeper explanation for the failure of corporate change efforts?" with the words:

The most universal challenge that we face is the transition from seeing our human institutions as machines to seeing them as embodiments of nature. ... Perhaps treating companies like machines keeps them from changing, or makes changing them much more difficult. We keep bringing in mechanics - when what we need are gardeners.

In an international context, it is worth noting that the use of the garden metaphor – like others metaphors as well – is culturally sensitive. Grisham in (Grisham, 2006) discusses the use of metaphors in a cross-cultural leadership situation. He points out that while some metaphors work cross-culturally, others do not. When using a garden metaphor in a Japanese context one must be aware that a Japanese garden has a specific meaning. With its specific elements, which one does not find in Western gardens, the Japanese garden can serve as a metaphor for Japan: "Japanese society is fluid and changes without altering its essential character. The garden is a reminder of the centrality of nature in Japanese society, religion (Shinto), and art" (p. 491).

The Britannica online dictionary defines "garden" as "Plot of ground where herbs, fruits, flowers, vegetables, or trees are cultivated.", and "gardening" as "Laying out and tending of a garden" (EncyclopediaBritannicaOnline, 2008). This definition covers a wide range of garden types, like a small garden in the backyard of a private home, a rose garden, a large recreational public garden, and even the biblical garden Eden.

In the organization-as-garden metaphor, the role of an organizational leader is commonly compared to the role of the gardener, such that insights for the leadership of an organization are drawn from insights from gardening. The task of the gardener in a garden can be compared with the task of a leader in an organization in several aspects. Both need to study the environment of their area of responsibility, lay out the specific purpose of it, prepare a conducive place for growth, get the right plants/people in to be able to fulfill the purpose, and tend to the individual plants/people to help them grow and bear fruits. However, additional insights can be gained from considering the role of a single plant in the garden, and applying those insights to the role of a leader in an organization, because every leader can also be considered just a plant in God's worldwide garden.

Naturally, the central theme of a garden is the growth of its plants. The gardener's main concern is when does each plant grow, how fast does it grow, in which soil does grow, how much water and how much sun does it need, what does it grow, what stimulates its growth, what hinders its growth, how does the growth of neighboring plants affect each other, and so on.

In 1970 Robert Greenleaf (1904–1990) published the article "The servant as leader" (Greenleaf, 1970), where Greenleaf introduces a kind of leadership, called servant leadership, which revolves around the question of the growth of the followers: "Do those being served grow as persons:

do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants?” ((Greenleaf, 1980) p. 43).

As in the garden, in servant leadership too, the central theme is the growth of the individual parts. This focus on the growth of the individual – and not primarily on the growth of the organization – is a unique characteristic of servant leadership. The discussion of “servant leadership” in Appendix B brings forth the following crucial characteristics of a servant leader:

1. A servant leader is a voluntary servant of a higher purpose beyond one’s own or others’ interests,
2. A servant leader is committed to serve others needs before one’s own, and to help others grow as individuals,
3. A servant leader consistently develops others into servant leaders,
4. A servant leader is committed to grow as leader and as servant towards the biblical servant leader Jesus Christ (or another servant leader model).

The Bible passage in Joh 15:1-8 is one of most obvious connections between the garden metaphor and biblical servant leadership. In this paragraph, Jesus applies the garden metaphor to Christian leadership with his father as gardener. Most of the following gardening analogies directly relate to the servant leaders’ focus on personal growth and on the growth of those being served.

Gardening Analogies for Organizational Leadership

Growing People Is Like Growing Grass

An African proverb goes, “Grass does not grow faster if you pull it”. Trying to make grass grow by pulling its blades kills the grass. First, the blade extends a little bit, especially if it is fresh grass, but by pulling a little harder, it tears off. It does not grow, instead it dies.

The same happens whenever the leadership of an organization tries to put pressure on people to make them grow. It finally kills the people. It kills their motivation, their health, and sometimes even their lives. Sustainable personal growth needs personal commitment and inner motivation. The leadership can only create a healthy environment to support the individual’s growth process by providing encouragement, vision and training, but leadership cannot force people to grow. It needs intrinsic motivation to ensure continuous healthy growth according to the individuals’ strengths, skills and gifts. According to (Wlodkowski, 1999) promoting learning among adults is most possible through culturally responsive teaching based on intrinsic motivation.

“For the servant leader, the main reason for leading is to help other people win”, ((Kouzes & Posner, 2004), p. 104). Helping people to win means helping them to grow. That is not possible by pulling or pushing, but only by encouraging their heart, enabling them to act and praying for them, as Jesus did. In Isa 42:3, it says about the coming Christ “A bruised reed he will not break”. Instead, Jesus Christ, the ultimate servant leader, came to heal the human brokenness. Trying to heal hurt and broken people, and bringing them back to healthy growth, is an outcome of the servant leader’s commitment to the growth of the followers.

The Right Placement Turns Weeds into Roses

According to Bühl (Bühl *et al.*, 1991) every plant, which grows in a place, where it is not wanted, could be called weeds. In a vegetable patch, roses are weeds. However, in most other parts of a garden, roses are considered beautiful flowers.

Sometimes what differentiates a poor achiever from a high achiever is only the person's placement in the organization. According to (Jennings & Stahl-Wert, 2004) it is one of the five key principles of serving leadership to arrange each person in a team or in a business, such that everyone contributes what he or she is best at. The right placement is especially important in working with high potentials in an organization. In (Goffee & Jones, 2007), the authors contend that "leaders have to create an environment in which what we call "clever people" can thrive" (p. 72). Clever people can cause more problems than average people can if they are in the wrong work place, but they can also become a greater asset for an organization if they are put in a place where they are not considered weeds and where they can thrive and prosper. First, the leadership needs to get to know both the potential of each of the people (plants) and the possible work places (soil) to develop the most fruitful combinations.

The Tree That Walks Grows Step by Step

The banyan tree's branches send down aerial roots that, when they reach the ground, take root in the ground. As they thicken, the roots support the branches which then grow and send down more roots that enable the tree to spread in amazing ways. (GeorgiaSouthernUniversity, 2007).

Therefore, banyan trees have been called "trees that walk". A strong tree needs a strong root. What makes the banyan tree unique is that it is continually growing new roots, which are not extensions of already existing roots. The Banyan does not only grow new branches and leaves and fruits, but also new roots. The new roots do not make the old ones obsolete, but they complement them and together they strengthen the tree and make it grow into new areas. Growing deeper to grow bigger and expand the area of influence is a growth process for all members of an organization. Growing deeper includes ongoing learning, working on personal issues - which might be hidden to the public, but which affect the public- , and remaining in touch with one's foundation of life.

A leader who wants to help others grow, must grow as well, because modeling is at the core of any leadership effort (e.g., (Covey, 2004; Kouzes & Posner, 2004)). As the banyan tree grows step by step by building increasingly firm foundations, leaders must commit themselves to ongoing deepening processes. "The path to greatness is a process of sequential growth from the inside out" ((Covey, 2004), p. 28). Based on the Bible passage in 1Pe 2:1-2 Buzzell (Buzzell, 1998) contends that "Leaders are not qualified merely because they practice good deeds (although they must do that). They are qualified by possessing a passion and a carving for high spiritual qualities and exhibiting a consistent pattern of growth in those qualities" (p. 1455). To model the way and to grow consistently, based on a firm ethical foundation, is a sound basis for effective leadership. Christ-centered servant leaders trust in the Lord and grow deep roots in God. Such leaders are like trees. Jer 17:7-8:

But blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in Him. He will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit.

It Takes More than Successful Leadership to Lead an Organization Successfully

A gardener can cultivate the garden in a perfect way, but still without sufficient supply of water and sunshine, the plants or even the whole garden might die. Manmade nurturing is necessary, but not sufficient for growth. All plants need a regular water supply and sunshine, the amount and the intensity needed varies from plant to plant. Greenhouses are only manmade inventions to reduce the dependency on nature and God. Even though technology is moving fast, it will never be able to replace the natural sunshine, wind and weather.

In an organizational set-up, it happens that the leadership does everything possible to help the people and the organization to grow, but due to unforeseeable developments, the organization will not flourish. In the final analysis, even the best leadership still is man made, and therefore has its limitations. The leader Paul, who sees himself as a gardener in the Christian community, has understood that in the final analysis all Christian growth is only God's grace, when he writes in 1Co 3:5-9:

What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe – as the Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labor. For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building.

Growth Requires Space

Bamboo is a kind of grass. It varies in height from one foot (30 cm) plants to giant timber bamboos that can grow to over 100 feet (30 m). Bamboo grows in many different climates, from jungles to high on mountainsides. Bamboos can be classified by the types of roots they have. Some, called runners, spread exuberantly, and others expand slowly from the original planting. Generally, the tropical bamboos tend to expand slowly and the temperate bamboos tend to be runners (Wolfram Franke, 2003).

In our garden, we had one of the temperate running bamboos. It was a beautiful plant, and we made several attempts to limit the growth of the bamboo and to keep it in a limited area. However, all attempts were to no avail, the bamboo cut through or grew under or over any set barrier and developed roots in other parts of our garden. The bamboo hindered the growth of other plants in the garden. The bamboo needed more space to grow. As we did not have more space, and the bamboo

did not stay within its allocated growth area, we finally had to pull it out to protect the rest of the garden.

People need space to grow, to try out new things, to develop new skills, to change themselves and the organization. The organization must provide sufficient space for growth within the organization, or must transfer the individual to another area, or even another organization. Otherwise, both the individual and the organization will suffer. Servant leaders provide the necessary growth environment for the individuals in the organization.

No Healthy Growth Without Regular Pruning

Trees are pruned to develop a strong branching pattern. The pruning of fruit trees not only shapes the future growth of the tree, it also increases the quality of the fruits. The goal of the pruning is to create a clear crown, which allows the air to go through the crown preventing diseases, and which lets the sunlight through. The sunlight is important for the flavor of the fruits. In general, a strong pruning fosters the growth more than a cautious one. Often the inexperienced gardener makes the mistake to prune too cautiously and only on the outer part of the crown. Pruning is important so that the tree will not invest too much of its resources into branches which bear no fruits. (Wolfram Franke, 2003)

Pruning, the focusing and prioritizing of the work of the individuals on what they are best at and what is most needed for their individual growth processes should become a regular process in any organization, as the gardener has to do it repeatedly. Pruning in an organization involves evaluating ongoing projects and ministries and cutting those areas, which will not bear lasting fruits, and focus the available resources on the fruit-bearing branches. Pruning is a very difficult leadership task, because it hurts people, as it involves cutting on projects, which seem to bear no lasting fruits. Only few leaders are willing to take on the role of the gardener, especially if there is no pressing need. In difficult times, sometimes external consultants are invited to do the necessary pruning. Often late in the process, so that instead of pruning the tree, the tree has to be cut. It takes courage to prune. In the garden, other than in many organizations, the pruning serves first the growth of the individual plant, and only secondly the growth of the garden.

Servant leaders are not afraid of pruning. They know it will hurt the plant but it will also ensure improved growth and fruit bearing. When Servant leaders prune, their motivation is the same as God's motivation for pruning as Jesus describes it in Joh 15:2: "Every branch that does bear fruit he (God) prunes, so that it will be even more fruitful."

The One, Who Outshines Others, Takes Them the Light to Grow

All plants need sunlight to grow. However, some plants need more sunlight than others do. Moreover, some plants take more of the sunlight at the expense of other plants remaining in the dark. The gardener has to make sure that the plants are placed in the right spots and that they get the sunlight they need.

In our garden, we have a cherry laurel sitting close to a rosebush. The roses need both regular fresh air and sunlight to flourish. However, the cherry laurel grows faster and thicker than the

rosebush. We needed to prune the cherry laurel, so that it does not grow into the rose bush. Instead of the cherry laurel outshining the rose bush, now both can flourish.

The leadership of an organization must be proactive in recognizing the staff's individual needs for growth and must create the space and environment necessary so that everyone can blossom. "Effective leaders help people develop their skills and empower people to become change agents and leaders themselves" (Yukl, 2006), p. 475).

You Cannot Change It, Your Organization Changes Day by Day

In the garden, continuous growth and death happen at the same time day by day. Often invisible at first, but it happens. Most of the changes are necessary to keep the plants growing. It needs the different seasons so that the plants can rest, gain new strength, multiply, flourish, and bear fruits at the right time. Sometimes, hurricanes, floods, or extreme heat drastically impact the plants in the garden.

The same is true for people and thus also for the organizations, they are working for. Organizational leadership needs to address such change situations, and be prepared for the unexpected by continuously evaluating the developments inside and outside of the organization. Change happens continuously, whether the leadership likes it or not. Moreover, without change, growth is impossible. (Buzzell, 1998): "The scriptures focus more on process than on product, because all believers are in a process of becoming the people God meant us to be. Without change, growth is impossible" (p. 1168).

Leading is Tending In and Out of Season

The gardener tends to the plants regularly. It is not only a part of his job, it is his main task. Not tending to every plant every day in the same manner, but tending to the plants based on their individual needs, and watching over the general direction of the garden growth. Listening to the people and nurturing them must an ongoing responsibility of the organizational leadership as well as making sure that the actual organizational development is in alignment with its basic purpose and mission.

Growth Has Its Season

Growth never happens in all areas at the same time. Every plant has its time. Some flourish in spring, others in summer. Some bear fruit in autumn. Only some remain green the whole year.

The same is true for organizations. Not all projects boom at the same time. Not all people work at the same pace. Therefore, it is necessary for the leadership to know its people and its projects well. So that they do not develop unrealistically high – or low – expectations.

Take Time to Enjoy Your People

Gardeners enjoy the roses, which grow more than they mourn about the seeds, which die in the process. Gardening is a wonderful job. To be in contact with growing and ever-changing plants, to watch the fruits develop, to nurture the plants with water and watch them recover from the heat, and to see the impact of the garden on other people. Moreover, "Every blossoming flower is a reminder of

God's faithfulness to us" ((Buzzell, 1998) p. 1122). A Chinese proverb goes "Life begins the day you start a garden!"

Leading often involves difficult, challenging, and suffering situations. For a leader to stay healthy and to be able to empower others, the leader needs to take time for herself/himself to sit back, relax, and enjoy the growth and the beauty of the organization. It infuses new power and joy, and makes the leadership grateful for the observable growth.

"No rose is without thorns", goes a common proverb. Servant leaders do not expect the perfect worker. They know to enjoy the blossom and have learnt to deal with the thorns. Servant leaders know to enjoy their people and their work.

Where There Is a Vision, There Is a Way Too

I have always admired the power of a small dandelion that breaks through the concrete asphalt. It is a plant with a small seed and soft blades. But it can go through the cracks in the asphalt and it breaks it up to reach the sunlight. The plant has never before been exposed to the sunlight, it has always lived in the dark soil. But internally there is this strong desire to break through to the light.

"Where there is no vision, the people perish" says the Bible (Pro 29:18). When there is no vision in the organization, the people and the organization will perish. The leadership is challenged to develop a vision that is as powerful as the dandelion's vision to get to the light. Servant leaders inspire a shared vision for individual and organizational growth.

If You Need to Pull Out Weed, Pull It Out as Fast and as Clean as Possible

Weed is always a problem in any kind of garden – except maybe in a weed garden. Weed can be generally defined as those plants, which grow without being planted. Often weeds are fast growing and robust, so that they can easily overgrow other plants. If a gardener recognizes weed in an area of the garden, the best recipe against weed is to get it out as fast as possible and as thorough as possible, especially including the root. Otherwise, the weed comes back immediately.

If there are negative things coming up in an organization like false accusations, betrayals, unresolved conflicts between people, the leadership must react as quickly as possible, must address the issue and resolve the issue. Servant leaders deal proactively with conflict. They focus on the creative potential inherent in any conflict more than on the potential destructive impact. They know that conflict is part of any growth process.

We Are Stronger than I

In an article about creating a wind resistant landscape (Tasker, 2007) contends that in order for a tree to survive a hurricane one has to "Create a design that locates trees in groups rather than individuals that are easy targets for big windstorms."

Applied to organizational leadership it means to encourage teamwork and community among the staff, so that in times of high external pressures the group members care for each other and do not only look for the leadership. With a unique system tabonuco trees are able to withstand even the strongest hurricanes.

Seedling populations of the tabonuco tree tend to concentrate on ridges where adults dominate and form tree unions by interconnecting all individuals through root grafts....The root connections of the tree union allow materials to interchange among trees, suppressed and dead trees and stumps resprout after the disturbance event. ((Lugo & Zimmerman, 2003), pp. 210-211)

As the tabonuco tree connects its roots with other tabonuco trees, and exchanges strengths and vital elements, the people in an organization are able to withstand external pressures if they have build strong relationships before the crisis. The leadership of the organization can encourage such developments. Servant leaders encourage community, and live community. Based on Ecc 4:12 (“A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.”) Buzzell notes, “Three separate individuals are as vulnerable as one individual. The word “relationship” implies the attempt to twist the threads together. The result? Better work, less vulnerability” ((Buzzell, 1998), p. 776).

Watering the Cactus Like a Rose Kills the Cactus, but Watering a Rose Like a Cactus Kills the Rose

Know your people. Know the ones you want to serve. Nurture them according to their needs and their individual growth pattern. Listen first, before taking action – even if the action is well intended.

Ivy Needs a Tree to Grow

Ivy is a plant, which needs a partner to grow. Ivy is a climbing plant, which needs another plant - which is not ivy – to climb and to grow. Often ivies climb on trees. Trees are natural supports for ivies. Lasting partnerships are only possible if the plants fit to each other. Small and weak ivies can go grow on bushes, but strong climbing ivies need strong trees to grow properly. (Wolfram Franke, 2003) What a tree means for the young ivy, that is the mentor for the younger, newer worker. People need other people to grow.

A Small Seed Can Make a Big Difference

Even big trees start from small seeds. It may take time for the seed to grow, but from the beginning, it already contains all potential that is needed to become a big tree.

It is important for the leadership of an organization to properly assess the future potential in the people, not to judge them based only on their present performance, and to provide a growth-promoting work environment.

Artificial Flowers Do Not Grow

Often artificial flowers look extremely pretty. Even after a week in a flower vase, the leaves do not go limp, the flower is still in full bloom, and it does not even require any water, sunshine, or nutrition to keep it looking pretty. They will never die. Many good reasons why to prefer artificial flowers to natural flowers. Artificial flowers only have one disadvantage: they do not grow! They stay the same forever. They will never die, but only, because they never lived.

Sometimes leaders wish their staff would behave like wonderful artificial flowers. However, soon they would discover that there is no more growth, no more flexible adaptation to changing environments, no more change at all. Organizations need living people who want to grow, and not people, who want to keep the status quo. The leadership must treat the people as living plants, which need a lot to grow, but which in the long run will always outshine the artificial flowers in the organization.

The Important Growth Is Hidden to the Public

The most important part of any plant is its root. The most important part of a plant's life is the time when the root is still hidden in the dark soil and preparing itself for its breakthrough. The gardener cannot yet observe any growth, and does not know whether the plant will bear fruits or not. However, the gardener knows the life cycle and the seasons of the plant, and when to expect the first leaves breaking through the soil.

The most important growth in an organization happens inside the people in the organization. Leaders need patience, a tending heart and listening ears to sense the growth of the people before it becomes obvious to all. Servant leaders allow the people the time to grow inside first before they grow in the public. Nothing can replace a strong root.

Summary and Conclusion

In a world, which is becoming increasingly complex every day, there is a growing interest in analogies and metaphors, which help people to understand complex realities by connecting them to common and well-known images. Metaphors are always biased and one-sided. Organizational leadership is one of those complex domains, where a variety of metaphors with different foci has already been applied. The organization-as-garden metaphor is both a very natural and very positive metaphor. Everyone has an understanding of a garden, which provides a variety of insights into organizational leadership. Most of the gardening analogies are about growth, like growing together (tabonuco tree), growing individually (the banyan tree), or growing in the right place (weed, bamboo). Growth is what gardening and servant leadership is all about. Metaphors are used also by the leadership organization to communicate their world views. The organization-as-garden metaphor is one of many metaphors for organization. It is a current metaphor in the way that it is a metaphor, which works with complexity, chaos, and living systems, and can therefore also be applied to modern post-Newtonian quantum organizations.

Looking specifically at the aspect of leadership in a garden and comparing it to leadership in an organization, shows that the organization-as-garden metaphor is unique in its focus on the growth of its individual parts. In organization theory, servant leadership is the organizational leadership concept, which focuses on the growth of the individual; particularly the Bible based servant leadership model with Jesus Christ as the ultimate model of a servant leader.

The Bible itself also uses analogies from the garden to communicate biblical truth (e.g., Joh 15). Moreover, the concept of a garden has an exceptional meaning in the Bible. From garden Eden to garden Gethsemane, to the eternal paradise, the garden in the Bible marks crucial times in God's

story with the world, as already Blaise Pascal (1623-1662) noted, “In a garden the world got lost, in a garden the world got redeemed”. The first job, which God gave to the first man on earth, Adam, was to be a gardener: “The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.” (Gen 2:15). From the beginning to the end gardens seem to play a major role in God’s design for this world. I feel that I have only scratched a little bit on the surface of the richness of wisdom in the Bible related to the implications of garden life for organizational life and especially to organizational servant leadership. I am sure there is still much more for me to learn.

Does the focus of the leadership concept determine the metaphors, which are used or do the metaphors determine the focus of the leadership? Both. Those who form the language in an organization – usually the leadership – choose the metaphors based on their leadership focus. The people in an organization, who adapt the language of the leaders, adapt also their metaphors. These metaphors influence the followers’ way of thinking and acting.

The leaders’ understanding of leadership will be reflected in the metaphors they use, but there is no one-to-one relationship between the preferred leadership model and the metaphors used (e.g., (Amernic et al., 2007)). Servant leaders should therefore be careful to use metaphors like the organization-as-garden metaphor rather than using war or machine metaphors, which communicate another type of leadership, which runs partly contrary to the servant leadership concept.

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Appendix A

Metaphors in Organization Theory

According to the online etymology dictionary (OnlineEtymologyDictionary, 2008), the word *metaphor* has its root in the Greek word *metaphora*, which means "a transfer," especially a transfer of the sense of one word to a different word. A metaphor transfers "the sense" from one domain of interest to another domain of interest. Metaphors are often used to bring new understanding or new insights from a well understood "source" (or "root") domain to a more difficult to understand "target" domain.

A well-known example for a metaphor is "All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players" (William Shakespeare), in which the theatre is the source domain and the world the target domain. Another example is the book title "The Heart of Change", in which the source domain is the human body and the target domain is the more abstract concept of change. The book title "The ABCs of Evaluation" is another metaphor, in which the source domain is the abstract domain of basic knowledge (The ABC) and the target domain is the abstract concept of higher knowledge.

While there exist many different kinds of metaphors, organization theory is particularly interested in conceptual metaphors (e.g., the two above mentioned book titles), which help to better understand complex organizational issues, or which provide new insights into the target domain. The more is known about the source domain, the higher the potential to gain new insights into the target domain. Meaning occurs through the familiarity of the links between the two domains, the source and the target domain. Using metaphors from different source domains for the same target domain organization leads to a variety of one-sided yet valuable insights about the complex system "organization". Morgan in his classical book *Images of Organization* (Morgan, 2006) is convinced "that all theories of organization and management are based on implicit images or metaphors that lead us to see, understand, and manage organizations in distinctive yet partial ways" (p. 4).

Recent authors like Oswick (Oswick et al., 2002) and Von Ghyczy (Ghyczy, 2003) come from a different angle, and study particularly the potential gain in creating new insights, which is inspired by the differences – not the similarities - between the source and the target domain, what Oswick calls the "cognitive discomfort zone" (p. 299). Oswick contends that tropes like anomaly, paradox, or irony, are more effective than metaphors to exploit the creative potential of the "cognitive discomfort zone". Von Ghyczy (2003) argues in the same direction, when he contends that to exploit the full creative potential of a business metaphor, it is important that "Instead of being seduced by the similarities between business and another field, you need to look for places where the metaphor breaks down" (p. 87).

According to (Witzel, 2002) the first organic metaphors go back to John Salisbury, an English philosopher in the 12th century, who mentions in his work *Policraticus* that the government resembles a human body with the prince as the head of the state, the parliament the heart, and the soldiers and peasants the limbs. In the last years, organic metaphors receive more attention, however with a different focus. Organisms are complex living systems, which are adaptive to external change, like the

human immune system. As such, some researchers (e.g., (Wheatley, 2006)) consider them a better image for post-Newtonian quantum organizations. While in the traditional machine metaphor the concept of organization is a closed and somewhat static structure, in the organism metaphor the concept of organization is a living entity in constant flux and change, interacting with the environment in an attempt to satisfy its needs (e.g., (Morgan, 2006), p. 33). In many aspects the organism metaphor goes well together with the early contingency theories of leadership as described in ((Yukl, 2006), pp. 232-265), because those contingency theories, like the situational leadership theory of Hersey and Blanchard, are based on how best to adjust to changes in the internal or external environment.

Appendix B

A Study on Servant Leadership

The focus on the growth of the individual – and not primarily the growth of the organization – distinguishes servant leadership from the closely related so-called “transformational leadership”, which was originally defined by (Burns, 1978): “While transformational leaders and servant leaders both show concern for their followers, the overriding focus of the servant leader is upon service to their followers.” ((Stone *et al.*, 2003) p. 4), and “in contrast to servant leadership, transformational and transactional leadership approaches place focus on personal growth of the leader or organization as primary and the follower as secondary” ((Boyum, 2006), p. 4). While “academic research on servant leadership is still in its infancy.” ((Stone *et al.*, 2003), p. 7), the concept of a servant leader is not a modern concept, but can be found already in the biblical account of the life of Jesus Christ: “Greenleaf is not the individual who first introduced the notion of servant leadership to everyday human endeavor. It was Christianity’s founder Jesus Christ who first taught the concept of servant leadership.” ((Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002), p. 58)

Jesus submitted his own life under the will of God (Luk 22:42), and he sacrificed his life freely out of service for others (Joh 10:30). He came to serve (Mat 20:28), although he was God’s son, and thus more powerful than any other leader in the world. He was an extremely powerful leader, who healed the sick (Mar 7:31-37), drove out demons (Mar 5:1-20), was recognized as Teacher and Lord (Joh 13:13), and had power over the wind and the sea and even over death (Mar 4:35-41; Mat 9:18-26). In Joh 13:1-17 Jesus gives a very practical example of what it means to serve others. He washes the feet of his followers, which used to be the responsibility of the house-servant. This passage shows that:

1. Jesus’ basic motivation was love for his followers (v. 1).
2. Jesus was fully aware of his position as leader (v. 14). Before the disciples experience him as their servant, they had already experienced him many times before as Master, and as a strong and extremely powerful leader.
3. Jesus becomes voluntarily a servant to his followers (v. 5-12). He did not come primarily as their foot washer, but he was ready to do this service for his followers if needed.
4. Jesus wants to set an example for his followers, which they shall follow (v. 14-15).

Based on the biblical teaching and living of Jesus Christ, being a servant leader means:

1. Being a voluntary servant, who submits oneself to a higher purpose, which is beyond one’s personal interests or the interests of others,
2. Being a leader, who uses the power, which is entrusted to her/him, to serve others,
3. Being a servant, who out of love serves others needs before one’s own,
4. Being a teacher, who teaches the followers in word and deed how to become servant leaders themselves.

Jesus certainly was a unique servant leader. The Bible says that he embodied both being human and being God. Therefore, no leader or servant on earth will ever reach his level of servant

leadership. Nevertheless, the example of Jesus can still serve as the ultimate example of a servant leader. There may be born leaders, but there are no born servant leaders, because it requires conscious decision making to become a servant to a higher purpose and to others. However, servant leaders can be developed and grow towards the ideal of Jesus Christ as the ultimate servant leader. Growth in relational issues always requires feedback. For a servant leader feedback from those being served is especially important.

Combining the thoughts on growth and feedback with the prior observations, a servant leader in a biblical understanding is a person, who is

1. Christ-centered in all aspects of life (a voluntary servant of Christ)
2. Committed to serve the needs of others before one's own,
3. Courageous to lead with power and love as an expression of serving,
4. Consistently developing others into leading servants, and
5. Continually inviting feedback from those the servant leader wants to serve in order to grow towards the ultimate servant leader, Jesus Christ.

In fact, it would be more appropriate to use the term “leading servant” here instead of “servant leader” because servant leadership researchers agree that servant leaders are servants first. Wallace (Wallace, 2007) contends that the term “servant-leader” better communicates the primacy of being a servant instead of being a leader. In “servant leader”, the term “servant” describes a certain kind of a leader. Primacy is given to “leadership” not to “servanthood”. In “servant-leader”, both aspects are of equal relevance. However, the term “leading servant” puts primacy on the “servanthood” aspect and – as a progressive form of the word “leading” implies - the act of leading might only be a temporary function while being a servant remains to be a lifelong commitment.

Some implications of points 1-5 are the following:

The servant leader is a “servant in all” in relationship to God, and a “servant first” in relationship to people. Jesus Christ came as God's servant (e.g., Isa 42:1, Isa 52:13, Act 3:26, 4:27). He came to serve us (Mat 20:28), however Christ did not come to be our servant. All Christians shall be God's servants in all parts of their lives. Serving God always implies serving people. (Buzzell, 1998) states: “he (Jesus) expects those who serve him in this world to express that service to him through their ministry to others” (p.1258) However, serving people does not necessarily imply serving the God of the Bible. One can also serve people based on a humanistic worldview.

There is a big difference between serving the needs of others and being a servant of others' needs. Serving the needs of others implies recognizing their needs (without judging them), and then do what can be done and what is in line with the higher purpose of serving God first to help satisfy that need. Being a servant of the needs of others, one has to do anything possible – whether it is in line with one's service to God or not – to satisfy the needs of others. The servant leader is a growing leader, led by the Holy Spirit.

Jesus probably was the only human being who never abused his power. For a leader the abuse of power is a major issue and temptation. Therefore, feedback from God and from the followers, and the sharing of power are necessary and helpful to apply power as leader in line with God's purpose and for the best of the followers. The development of followers into servant leaders requires the servant leader to pass on power to them (sharing of power) so that they can also grow in using that power to serve others.

Several authors point out that servant leadership is first of all about the character of the leader (e.g., (Greenleaf, 1970), (Reinhardt, 2003; Rinehart, 1998), (Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002)). Servant leadership is more about being than about doing. Without a serving heart it is almost impossible to become a servant leader. There are different ways to grow servant leaders. (Ndoria, 2004) contends that "the principles outlined by servant leadership are a clear indication that servant leadership behavior can be taught and developed" (p. 1). Greenleaf, however, is convinced that the crucial step for an established leader to become a servant leader is to become a servant to others, which cannot be taught or developed, but requires a kind of conversion. "For the older ones among us who are in charge nothing short of a peak experience like religious conversion or psychoanalysis or an overpowering new vision seems to have much chance of converting a confirmed nonservant into an affirmative servant" ((Greenleaf, 1980), p. 23). Therefore, highest priority should be given to help servant leaders to grow in their service to God. Out of this then flows more easily true service to others.

The growth process of a servant leader is three-dimensional:

1. growing as a voluntary servant of God or a higher purpose,
2. growing as a servant of others, and
3. growing as a leader.

If someone is already a committed servant of God and of others, one needs to employ one's leadership gifts to serve others as a leader with the right use of power and with love. Leadership skills training, continuous encouragement and feedback can support a servant leader in this growth process. Sometimes, it takes crisis situations to bring forth the leadership qualities of a servant, like in the case of the servant in Hermann Hesse's (Hesse, 1956) novel *The journey to the East*, which stimulated Greenleaf to start thinking "the servant as leader". Someone, who is already a leader, but who wants to become a servant leader, also needs training, encouragement and feedback, but needs much more a conversion towards servanthood, and this commitment needs to be strengthened again and again. It is harder to learn to be a servant than to learn to be a leader – especially for those, who have been already for many years in a senior leadership position.

The second dimension is the learning servant who wants to grow as leader and as servant. Therefore, the servant leader invites feedback especially from God – through prayer, Bible reading, and communication with spiritual mentors – and from the people being served. One way to start a feedback process with the people the servant leader wants to serve simply is to ask them how the

leader can serve them best. Ideally, the feedback process will be an ongoing process, resulting in the servant leader serving more on target and according to the actual needs of the people.

It should be more natural for Christians than for believers of other faiths to become a servant leader, because according to the Bible, serving the Christian God implies serving others. This is not necessarily true for other faiths as (Wallace, 2006) points out: “In comparing these worldviews with servant leadership, significant contradictions with the theory were found within Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam.” (p. 15). For Wallace the essence of servant leadership is being a servant. He concludes that Greenleaf’s Servant leadership concept can be traced down to the Judeo-Christian philosophy, but it is not the only leadership theory, which is in line with the Judeo-Christian tradition.

The understanding of a servant leader as described above can also be extended to a not necessarily Christ-centered servant leader. More general, a servant leader is someone who is

1. A voluntary servant of a higher purpose beyond one’s own or others’ interests,
2. Committed to serve others needs before one’s own,
3. Courageous to lead with power and love as an expression of his service,
4. Consistently developing others into servant leaders,
5. Continually inviting feedback from those being served in order to grow towards the ultimate servant leader Jesus Christ (or another servant leader model)

In this context, “higher purpose” can be any kind of God. It could be the Christian God, it could be Allah, it could be money or success, or it could be any kind of religion or ideal. The main challenge here is to get the service towards the “higher purpose” in line with the service towards others. (Boyum, 2006) mentions the example of “the largest retail giant in the world that contends it has incorporated servant leadership” (p. 6), but ultimately their focus was on financial gain rather than on the well-being of the employees.

According to the Bible, to become a servant of the God of the Bible and to enjoy serving others is not only a decision, which a person needs to take, but first a gracious gift from the God of the Bible. Therefore, it cannot be demanded as a prerequisite for becoming a servant leader. However, the example of Jesus Christ can still serve as the ultimate model of servant leadership, even for people, who do not follow Jesus Christ.