



## GARDENING TIPS FOR SERVANT-LEADERS, PART 2

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**M**etaphors always produce a kind of one-sided perspective, and imply a particular way of thinking and of seeing. They transfer meaning from a well-understood source domain such as “gardening” to a rather complex target domain such as “organizational leadership.” Different metaphors of organization have different focuses. While the organization-as-machine metaphor focuses on the functioning of each part, the focus of the organization-as-garden metaphor is the healthy growth of the individual plant/person. In organization theory, it is the servant-leader who focuses on the growth of the individual, and who continuously asks himself the Greenleaf test question, “Do those being served grow as persons?” (Greenleaf, 1980, p. 43). Based on the organization-as-garden metaphor, these final ten gardening tips provide insights from gardening for the practice of servant-leadership, which can be applied in private as well as in organizational communication to get the message of servant-leadership across, and to illustrate the beauty of servant-leadership.

### THE USE OF ANALOGIES AND METAPHORS IN ORGANIZATIONAL LEADERSHIP

The word *analogy* stems from the Greek word *analogia* meaning *proportion*. An analogy is to say that a part—or an aspect—of “A” resembles “B,” for example, to say, that “gardening” resembles “leading an 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” is a “garden.” 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; 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, reveals new insights into organizational leadership.

Organizational leadership is a very complex domain. According to Yukl “the definition of leadership (in organizations) is arbitrary and subjective. Some definitions are more useful than others, but there is no single “correct” definition that captures the essence of leadership” (Yukl, 2006, p.26). One of the newer definitions of 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 ninety variables, they develop a comprehensive integrative definition of leadership, which is more than 650 words long, and which hints the enormous complexity of organizational leadership.

Metaphors are particularly helpful in creating a better understanding and new insights into such complex domains as leadership in organizations. Twenty years after Morgan (2006) 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 that metaphors play in understanding and managing organizations. Moreover, he notes that “[m]etaphor is central to the way we “read”, understand, and shape organizational life” (Morgan, 2006, p. 8). 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 presents some of the well-explored metaphors such as 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 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 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 and Mayer-Schoenberger, 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 that 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).

How leaders use metaphors to influence the organization and the public shows in the example of Jack Welch, the longstanding CEO of General Electric, and 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 he used. 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 present essay focuses on the organization-as-garden metaphor and reveals several similarities between gardening and organizational leadership with the same concern 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).



## THE GARDEN METAPHOR

The organization-as-garden metaphor has gained more attention in the last years. In an interview in 1999 published by the Fast Company, Peter Senge (Senge, 1999) remarks:

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 metaphors 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, such as a small garden in the backyard of a private home, a rose garden, a large recreational public garden, and even the biblical Garden of 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. In many aspects, the task of the gardener in a garden is similar to the task of a leader in an organization. Both will study the environment, define a specific purpose, 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—or even parts of a plant—in the garden, and applying those insights to the role of a leader in an organization. Every Christian leader can also be considered just a plant (e.g., a “tree” as in Psa 1) or a part of a plant (e.g., a vine branch in Joh 15) 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 it 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 he 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 toward 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 TIPS

#### *Take Time to Enjoy the Flowery Scent*

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 a Weed, Pull It out, Do It Stout*

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

If there are negative things coming up in an organization, such as 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 Always 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 “[c]reate a design that locates trees in groups rather than individuals that are easy targets for big windstorms.”

Applied to organizational leadership, this 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 patterns. Listen first, before taking action—even if the action is well intended.



### *Ivy Needs a Tree to Grow*

Ivy is a plant that 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 necessary 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 Are Beautiful, but 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 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.



### *Visible Growth Always Starts Invisible*

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.

### *Servant Partnerships Shed Lasting Fragrance*

“Ideal plant partnerships are combinations in which either the blooms or the leaves of the plants harmonize such that the plants complement each other in their impact and look more beautiful together than alone.” (Stuart, 2004, p. 6). Usually, plant partnerships are judged only by their blooms, but there are various other ways to combine plants effectively. It can be the design of the leaves, the complexity of the plant (simple/complex), the flowering times, or the flowery scent of the plants, which complement each other. For example, the flowery scents of roses and of Italian honeysuckle complement each other. The scent of the Italian honeysuckle is strongest in the evening when the scent of the roses fades. Stuart (2004) notes, “It is an art to combine plants in such a way that no partner receives more attention than another” (p. 102). Successful plant partnerships have in common the understanding that the individual plants share the same soil requirements, have the same need for sunshine—if not, one of the plants provides shade for the other partners—share those resources that are necessary for the growth of each partner, and that each plant brings into the partnership its unique contribution. Often a certain distance between the plant partners is required such that the roots of the plants do not compete with each other for vital resources such as water and nutrients. In some cases, a certain age and strength of the partner is a prerequisite to enter into a successful plant partnership. Roses and trees, for example, can develop a wonderful plant



partnership, if the tree is already grown up enough to not get overgrown by the strong growth of the roses (Stuart, 2004, p. 35). The gardener plays a crucial role as plant partnership facilitator, who knows each plant and how best to combine them, so that they will complement each other.

Partnership, alliance, collaboration, cooperation, coalition, network, to name but a few, are terms used in organization theory to describe the “working together” of two or more partners or organizations. Partnerships between organizations are on the rise worldwide. In 1995, Peter Drucker observed, “The greatest change in corporate structure, and in the way business is being conducted, may be the largely unreported growth of relationships that are not based on ownership but on partnership” (Drucker, 1995, p. 69.), and, “the trend toward partnership is accelerating” (p. 70). Five years later, James Austin contends, “The twenty-first century will be the age of alliances” (Austin, 2000, p. 1). Another five years later, Selsky and Parker note, “Collaborative activities have become more prominent and extensive in all sectors of many nations in the past 25 years” (Selsky & Parker, 2005, p. 849). In the leadership literature, authors use different terms with different definitions to describe “partnership,” and sometimes the same terms carry different meanings for different authors. For example, Butler (2005), who focuses on connecting international Christian ministries, distinguishes among “covenant,” “network,” “consensus partnership,” and “strategic alliance based on the level of complexity of the partnership, the number of partners involved, the focus, and how the partnership is organized” (Butler, 2005, p. 252). Here “partnership” is used as an umbrella term for any kind of “working together” between two or more organizations. In the concrete realization of a partnership, the partners themselves need to create a mutual understanding of the specifics that their “working together” shall entail. In the management literature on cross-sector partnerships between organizations coming from different sectors—the public, the private, and the nonprofit sector—six elements seem to be the “sine qua non” of successful cross-sector partnerships. They are clarity about each partner’s needs, clarity about each partner’s strengths, compatible values, overlapping missions, a commitment to a partnership process, and the development of a trusting relationship between the partners (e.g., Austin, 2000; Hesselbein et al., 1999; Sagawa & Segal, 2000). Comparing these six elements of successful cross-sector partnership with the elements of a successful plant partnership shows the strong connection between organizational leadership and gardening. Compatible values correspond to compatible soil requirements.



Clarity about each partner's needs and strengths compares to the individual contribution of each plant and what is required from the partner plant to complement each other. For example, the roses need a partner with a flowery scent in the evening, while the honeysuckle needs a partner who sheds fragrance during daytime. The overlapping missions of the partners correspond with the goal that plant partnerships are making a greater impact together than each plant alone (e.g., more beautiful, more fruitful, a longer-lasting fragrance). The commitment to the process goes together with the commitment to the natural growth process of the plants. The development of a trusting relationship can be interpreted into the fact that each plant grows in partnership with the other plant trusting—but not knowing—that the partner will finally contribute the promised fruit or fragrance, which is crucial to the success of the plant partnership.

Butler (2005) highlights the importance of the role of the partnership facilitator, as “lasting partnerships need a committed facilitator” (Butler, 2005, p. 319). He dedicates a whole chapter—entitled “The Partnership Facilitator: The Vision-Powered Servant Leader”—to discuss the role, the function, and the requirements of a partnership facilitator. According to Butler, servant-leaders make the best partnership facilitators. In the garden context, the gardener takes on the role of the partnership facilitator, serving the development of the plant partnership. Servant partnerships are characterized by a servant-leader facilitator, who serves all partners involved such that they grow as partners in a lasting partnership, which sheds lasting fragrance to the world.

#### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In a world that becomes increasingly complex every day, there is a growing interest in analogies and metaphors, which help people to understand and illustrate complex realities by relating them to common and well-known images. Organizational leadership is one of the complex domains, which can be understood in different ways by applying different kinds of metaphors. The metaphor in use in an organization tells something about the self-perception of the leadership in an organization. The organization-as-garden metaphor is both a very natural and a very positive metaphor. Its focus is the growth of the individual. Therefore, most of the gardening analogies talk about the growth aspect, such as growing together (tabo-nuco tree), growing individually (the banyan tree), or growing in the right place (weed, bamboo). Being focused on the growth of the individual is the



outstanding characteristic of servant-leadership. Individual growth is what gardening and servant-leadership are all about.

Does the focus of the leadership concept determine the metaphors that are used, or do the metaphors determine the focus of the leadership? Both happen. Those who form the language and the culture in an organization the most—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 paradigm.

Analogies from the garden have already been applied effectively in the Bible to communicate biblical truth (e.g., Joh 15). Obviously, the concept of a garden bears a significant meaning in the Bible. From Garden of Eden to the Garden of Gethsemane, to the eternal paradise, the gardens in the Bible always mark crucial times in God's story with the world. Already Blaise Pascal (1623–1662) noted, "In a garden the world got lost, in a garden the world got redeemed." Moreover, 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, the garden seems to play an important role in God's design for this world. Learning from the garden seems to be a promising undertaking for all leaders—for their living as well as for their leading.

#### 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 of 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 that 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, such as 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 such as 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 “[i]nstead 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 twelfth 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 more recent years, organic metaphors have received 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 experienced him as their servant, they had already experienced him many times before as Master, and as a strong and extremely powerful leader.
3. Jesus became 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 wanted 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 that 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 toward 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 toward 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 (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 doing 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 the service to God, true service to others flows more easily.

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, as in the case of the servant in Hermann Hesse's (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 toward 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 servant-leaders, 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 to Judeo-Christian philosophy, but it is not the only leadership theory that 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 generally, 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 serving others’ needs before one’s own,
3. Courageous in leading with power and love as an expression of the servant-leader’s service,
4. Consistently developing others into servant-leaders,
5. Continually inviting feedback from those being served in order to grow toward 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 toward the “higher purpose” in line with the service toward 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 its 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 consider themselves followers of Jesus Christ.

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Thorsten Grahn received his PhD in Mathematics from the University of Heidelberg, Germany. From 1993 to 1997 Thorsten coordinated the social ministries of the German Allianz-Mission in Manila (Philippines). Since 1999, Thorsten has worked for the German Christian media organization, ERF Medien in Wetzlar, Hesse. He directs their international ministries in twenty languages for foreigners in Germany, and he coordinates ERF’s worldwide ministry in partnership with national NGOs in Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Americas. In May 2008, Thorsten graduated from the MA in Organizational Leadership program of the Azusa Pacific University in California, USA.

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#### EDITOR’S NOTE

In the second installment of Thorsten Grahn’s beautiful essay on Gardening Tips for Servant-Leaders, we find the second ten tips outlined by Grahn. The first ten appeared in our 2009 *International Journal of Servant-Leadership*. The references section includes references from the first and second installments of Grahn’s article.

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