

CHAPTER 21

MACHINES OR GARDENS... OR BOTH?

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Organizations have been thought of in machine-like terms for more than a century. Grounded in a Newtonian view of the universe, classical organization theorists argued that organizations should be orderly, predictable, and designed for maximum control. This metaphor has come under heavy attack by those who prefer language that reflects the organic nature of organizations. Organizations, in this view, are more accurately thought of as living systems, and managers should view their role more like gardeners than mechanics. But is the machine metaphor really defunct? The authors have been hearing and reading language that is eminently machine-like: leverage, drivers ('create and drive a vision'), and knowledge depot are just a few. We ask, therefore, are these kinds of references still useful even if they are not adequate? And if so, in what relation to organic, organization-as-garden, metaphors? In short, can machine metaphors be coupled with organic ways of thinking and talking about organizations to achieve more holistic - and realistic - understanding?