

Teal Organizations

"The most exciting breakthroughs of the twenty-first century will not occur because of technology, but because of an expanding concept of what it means to be human."

John Naisbitt

The Teal paradigm refers to the **next stage in the evolution** of human consciousness.^[1] When applied to organizations, this paradigm views the organization as an independent force with its own purpose, and not merely as a vehicle for achieving management's objectives.

Teal organizations are characterized by self-organization and self-management. The hierarchical "predict and control" pyramid of Orange is replaced with **a decentralized structure consisting of small teams that take responsibility for their own governance and for how they interact with other parts of the organization.** Assigned positions and job descriptions are replaced with a multiplicity of roles, often **self-selected and fluid.**

People's actions are guided not by orders from someone up the chain of command but by 'listening' to the organization's purpose. Unlike the highly static nature of Amber, Orange and Green organizations, **the organizational structure in Teal is characterized by rapid change and adaptation, as adjustments are continuously made to better serve the organization's purpose.**

Teal stage of consciousness

To understand the Teal organizational paradigm, it is necessary to understand the level of human consciousness that it comes from. Abraham Maslow, the pioneering psychologist, and other authors agree that the **shift from Green to Teal is a particularly momentous one in the human journey** — so much so that Clare W. Graves, another psychologist known for his work in developmental models, and others in his wake have used the term "first-tier" consciousness for all stages up to and including Green and the term **"second-tier" for the stages starting with Teal.** All **"first-tier" stages consider that their worldview is the only valid one, and that all other people are dangerously mistaken.**^[2] People transitioning to Teal can accept, for the first time, that there is an evolution in consciousness, that there is **a momentum in evolution towards ever more complex and refined ways of dealing with the world** (hence the term "Evolutionary-Teal").^{[3][4]} See also Developmental Perspective on Organizations.

Taming the fears of the ego

Each shift in consciousness occurs when we are able to reach a higher vantage point from which we see the world in broader perspective. Like a fish that can see water for the first time when it jumps above the surface, gaining a new perspective requires that **we dis-identify from something**

we were previously engulfed by. The shift to Conformist-Amber, for instance, happens when Impulsive-Red internalizes rules that allow it to dis-identify from impulsively satisfying its needs; the shift to Achievement-Orange happens when Amber dis-identifies from group norms.

The shift to Evolutionary-Teal happens when we learn to dis-identify from our own ego. By looking at our ego from a distance, we can suddenly see how its fears, ambitions, and desires often run our life. We can learn to minimize our need to control, to look good, to fit in. We are no longer fused with our ego, and we don't let its fears reflexively control our lives. In the process, we make room to listen to the wisdom of other, deeper parts of ourselves.

What replaces fear? A capacity to trust the abundance of life. All wisdom traditions posit the profound truth that there are two fundamental ways to live life: from fear and scarcity or from trust and abundance. In Evolutionary-Teal, we cross the chasm and learn to decrease our need to control people and events. We come to believe that even if something unexpected happens or if we make mistakes, things will turn out all right, and when they don't, life will have given us an opportunity to learn and grow.^[5]

Inner rightness as compass

When we are fused with our ego, we are driven to make decisions informed by external factors — what others will think or what outcomes can be achieved. In the Impulsive-Red perspective, a good decision is the one that gets me what I want. In Conformist-Amber, we hold decisions up to the light of conformity to social norms. Decisions beyond what one's family, religion, or social class considers legitimate cause guilt and shame. In Achievement-Orange, effectiveness and success are the yardsticks by which decisions are made. In Pluralistic-Green, matters are judged by the criteria of belonging and harmony. In Evolutionary-Teal, we shift from external to internal yardsticks in our decision-making. We are now concerned with the question of inner rightness: Does this decision seem right? Am I being true to myself? Is this in line with who I sense I'm called to become? Am I being of service to the world?

With fewer ego-fears, we are able to make decisions that might seem risky, where we haven't weighed all possible outcomes, but that resonate with deep inner convictions. We develop a sensitivity for situations that don't quite feel right, situations that demand that we speak up and take action, even in the face of opposition or with seemingly low odds of success, out of a sense of integrity and authenticity. Recognition, success, wealth, and belonging are viewed as pleasurable experiences, but also as tempting traps for the ego. In contrast with previous stages, the order is reversed: we do not pursue recognition, success, wealth, and belonging to live a good life. We pursue a life well-lived, and the consequence might just be recognition, success, wealth, and love.^[6]

Life as a journey of unfolding

In previous stages, the pursuit of love, recognition, and success shapes our lives slowly but surely to the point that we end up, in the words of poet May Sarton, “wearing other people’s faces.”

In Teal, our journey toward inner rightness prompts some **soul searching of who we are and what our purpose in life might be**. The ultimate goal in life is not to be successful or loved, but to **become the truest expression of ourselves, to live into authentic selfhood, to honor our birthright gifts and callings, and be of service to humanity and our world.**

In Teal, life is seen as a journey of **personal and collective unfolding** toward our true nature. This is like a Copernican revolution in an age that tells us that we can become anything we want, if we only put our mind to it. If we “go Teal”, then instead of setting goals for our life, dictating what direction it should take, we learn to let go and **listen to the life that wants to be lived through us**. Parker Palmer, the author, educator, and activist, writes beautifully about this perspective on life and vocation in his book *Let Your Life Speak*:

Behind the understanding of vocation is a truth that the ego does not want to hear because it threatens the ego’s turf: everyone has a life that is different from the “I” of daily consciousness, a life that is trying to live through the “I” who is its vessel. ... It takes time and hard experience to sense the difference between the two — to sense that **running beneath the surface of the experience I call my life, there is a deeper and truer life waiting to be acknowledged.**^[7]

Many people transitioning to this stage take up practices like meditation, centering, martial arts, yoga, or simply walking in nature to find a quiet place that allows the inner voice of the soul to speak its truth and guidance. **Individuals who live from this perspective and connect to a deeper sense of purpose can become quite fearless in pursuit of their calling.** With their ego under control, **they don’t fear failure as much as not trying.** Clare Graves’ favorite phrase to describe someone operating from Teal was **“a person who has ambition, but is not ambitious.”**

Growing into their true nature and working toward their calling is their driving force, so much so that to others who don’t come from the same perspective, persons operating from Teal can sometimes come across as impatient with people who impede their personal growth, or with situations that don’t feel aligned with the purpose they perceive for their life.^[8]

Building on strengths

When we set goals for our life that are disconnected from our deeper selfhood, when we wear other people’s faces, we don’t stand in the strength of our selfhood. **Inevitably we will find**

ourselves lacking and invest much energy in trying to overcome our weaknesses, or in blaming ourselves or others for not being who we think we ought to be.

When we see our life as a journey of unfolding toward our true nature, we can look more gently and realistically at our limitations and be at peace with what we see. Life is not asking us to become anything that isn't already seeded in us. We also tend to focus less on what is wrong or missing in people and situations around us and move our attention instead to what is there, to the beauty and the potential. We trade in judgment for compassion and appreciation.

Psychologists talk about a shift from a deficit to a strength-based paradigm. Slowly, this shift is making profound inroads in different fields, from management to education, from psychology to health care — starting with the premise that, as human beings, we are not problems waiting to be solved, but potential waiting to unfold.^[9]

Dealing gracefully with adversity

When life is seen as a journey of discovery, then we learn to deal more gracefully with the setbacks, the mistakes, and the roadblocks in our life. We can start to grasp the spiritual insight that there are no mistakes, simply experiences that point us to a deeper truth about ourselves and the world. In previous stages, life's roadblocks (an illness, a bad boss, a difficult marriage) are seen as unfair rolls of the dice. We meet them with anger, shame, or blame, and these feelings disconnect us from others and ourselves.

In Teal, obstacles are seen as life's way to teach us about ourselves and about the world. We are ready to let go of anger, shame, and blame, which are useful shields for the ego but poor teachers for the soul. We embrace the possibility that we played a part in creating the problem, and inquire what we can learn so as to grow from it.

In earlier paradigms, we often convince ourselves that everything is all right until a problem has snowballed and hits us like an avalanche, forcing change into our life. Now, we tend to make frequent small adjustments, as we learn and grow from problems we encounter along the way. In previous stages, change on a personal level feels threatening. As of Evolutionary-Teal, there is often an enjoyable tension in the journey of personal growth.^[10]

Wisdom beyond rationality

In Orange, rationality is king and rules unquestioned in the pursuit of the decision that will yield the best outcome. Any source of insight other than facts and logical reasoning is "irrational" and must be discarded. Ironically, however, Orange's attachment to outcomes often clouds the ability to see reality clearly. Amid the stacks of information that are meant to inform complex decisions,

we can fail to see information that is incongruous with our worldview or with the future our ego has projected and is attached to; often the writing was all over the wall, and yet people dismissed the clues (or didn't dare to speak up).

Teal, less attached to outcomes, can more easily accept the sometimes unpleasant truths of reality; therefore, rational thinking within Teal can be more accurately informed by data.

Beyond facts and figures, cognition at this stage taps a broader range of sources to support decision making. The Orange modern-scientific perspective is wary of emotions that could cloud our ability to reason rationally, whereas Green sometimes goes to the other extreme, rejecting analytical "left brain" approaches for "right brain" feeling as a basis for decision-making.

Teal is happy to tap into all the domains of knowing. There are insights to be gained from analytical approaches. There is also wisdom to be found in emotions, if we learn to inquire into their significance: Why am I angry, fearful, ambitious, or excited? What does this reveal about me or about the situation that is unfolding?

Wisdom can be found in intuition, too. Intuition honors the complex, ambiguous, paradoxical, non-linear nature of reality; we unconsciously connect patterns in a way that our rational mind cannot. Intuition is a muscle that can be trained, just like logical thinking: when we learn to pay attention to our intuitions, to honor them, to question them for the truth and guidance they might contain, more intuitive answers will surface.

Many people believe that there are answers to be found in yet deeper sources. Wisdom traditions and transpersonal psychology trust that if we don't simply ask a question, but live a question, the universe in its abundance may give us clues to the answer in unexpected events and synchronicity or in words and images that arise in dreams and meditations. Non-ordinary states of consciousness — meditative states, contemplative states, visionary experiences, flow, peak experiences — are available at any stage of consciousness, but from Teal onward, people often take on regular practices to deepen their experience in these states and access the full spectrum of human experience.^[11]

Another cognitive breakthrough is the ability to reason in paradox, transcending the simple either-or with more complex both-and thinking. Breathing in and breathing out provides an easy illustration of the difference. In either-or thinking, we see them as opposites. In both-and thinking, we view them as two elements that need each other: the more we can breathe in, the more we can breathe out. The paradox is easy to grasp for breathing in and out; it is less obvious for some of the great paradoxes of life that we only start to truly understand when we reach

Teal: freedom and responsibility, solitude and community, tending to the self and tending to others.

Put this all together — a fearless rationality and the wisdom that can be found in emotions, intuition, events, and paradoxes — and Evolutionary-Teal turns the page from the rational-reductionist worldview of Orange and the post-modern worldview of Green to a holistic approach to knowing.^[12]

Striving for wholeness

Dis-identifying from the ego is one more step of liberation on the human journey. But with disidentification comes separation, and people operating at this stage often develop a keen sense of how far we have let separation fragment our lives and how much it has cost us. We have let our busy egos trump the quiet voice of our soul; many cultures often celebrate the mind and neglect the body; value the masculine above the feminine; and many of us have lost community and our innate connection with nature.

With this stage comes a deep yearning for wholeness — bringing together the ego and the deeper parts of the self; integrating mind, body, and soul; cultivating both the feminine and masculine parts within; being whole in relation to others; and repairing our broken relationship with life and nature. Often the shift to Teal comes with an opening to a transcendent spiritual realm and a profound sense that at some level, we are all connected and part of one big whole. After many successive steps of disidentification, as we learn to be fully independent and true to ourselves, it dawns on us that, paradoxically, we are profoundly part of everything.

This longing for wholeness is at odds with the separation that most existing workplaces foster, albeit unconsciously — overemphasizing the ego and the rational while negating the spiritual and emotional; separating people based on the departments they work in, their rank, background, or level of performance; separating the professional from the personal; separating the organization from its competitors and the ecosystem it is embedded in.

Vocabulary we use is often revealing: in organizations, we often speak about “work-life balance” a notion that shows how little life is left in work when we have separated ourselves from so much that truly matters. For people transitioning to Teal, these separations in the workplace often become so painful that they choose to leave organizational life for some form of self-employment, a more accommodating context to find wholeness with themselves and with others.^[13]

Wholeness in relation to others

In Evolutionary-Teal, we can transcend the opposites of judgment and tolerance. In earlier stages, when we disagree with other people, we often meet them in judgment, believing that we must be right and they must be wrong. Our task then is to convince, teach, fix, or dismiss them. Or we can, in the name of tolerance, the Green ideal, gloss over our differences and affirm that all truths are equally valid.

In Teal, we can transcend this polarity and integrate with the higher truth of non-judgment we can examine our belief and find it to be superior in truth and yet embrace the other as a human being of fundamentally equal value.

In the absence of judgment, relationships take on a new quality. Our listening is no longer limited to gathering information so as to better convince, fix, or dismiss. We can create a shared space safe from judgment, where our deep listening helps others to find their voice and their truth, just as they help us find ours. In Orange, we broke free from the oppressive, normative communities of Amber. Now we have a chance to recreate community on new grounding, where we listen each other into selfhood and wholeness.^[14]

Wholeness with life and nature

Paradoxically, again, the more we learn to be true to our unique self, the more it dawns on us that we are just one expression of something larger, an interconnected web of life and consciousness. That realization can be elating but also painful — we now comprehend how deeply our relationship with life and nature has been broken. We strive to repair that relationship, not from a place of moral obligation, but from an inner awareness, knowing that we are not separate from but one with nature. We see the foolishness and arrogance of mankind's stance of putting itself above the rest of life and try to find a more truthful and humble place in the midst of it. Often, rekindling our relationship with life and nature causes us to pursue a simpler life, less cluttered by possessions we thought we needed until we understood that we are rich not through the things we own, but through the relationships that nourish our soul.^[15]

Breakthroughs and characteristics of Teal organizations

Like earlier organizational paradigms, Teal can be credited with bringing about certain fundamental breakthroughs in how humans collaborate:

Teal breakthrough 1: Self-Management

Teal Organizations have found the key to operate effectively, even at a large scale, with a system based on peer relationships, without the need for either hierarchy or consensus. (See [Self-Management](#)).

Teal breakthrough 2: Wholeness

Organizations have always been places that encourage people to show up with a narrow “professional” self and to check other parts of the self at the door. They often require us to show a masculine resolve, to display determination and strength, and to hide doubts and vulnerability. Rationality rules as king, while the emotional, intuitive, and spiritual parts of ourselves often feel unwelcome, out of place. Teal Organizations have developed a consistent set of practices that invite us to reclaim our inner wholeness and bring all of who we are to work. (See [Wholeness](#)).

Teal breakthrough 3: Evolutionary Purpose

Teal Organizations are seen as having a life and a sense of direction of their own. Instead of trying to predict and control the future, members of the organization are invited to listen in and understand what the organization wants to become, what purpose it wants to serve. (See [Evolutionary Purpose](#)).

Teal metaphor: organizations as living systems

Teal organizations have a useful metaphor for the workplaces they aspire to create. Whereas Achievement-Orange speaks of organizations as machines and Pluralistic-Green uses the metaphor of families, Teal organizations refer to themselves as living organisms or living systems. Life, in all its evolutionary wisdom, manages ecosystems of unfathomable beauty, ever evolving toward more wholeness, complexity, and consciousness. Change in nature happens everywhere, all the time, in a self-organizing urge that comes from every cell and every organism, with no need for central command and control to give orders or pull the levers.^[16]

Teal organizations as "complex adaptive systems"

An Evolutionary-Teal organization exhibits many properties of a [Complex Adaptive System](#)^[17]

1. It has a purpose of its own, distinct from the purposes or objectives of its members,
2. It consists of a number of elements (members or teams),
3. The elements interact, in a non-linear way, to achieve the purpose of the system,

4. The interaction and relationships between elements are based on a few simple rules or guiding principles,
5. The nature of the relationships and number of interactions between the elements result in emergent behavior - the behavior of the system is not the sum of the behaviors of the elements,
6. The elements produce and use signals and information (sensing) from both external and internal environments and react accordingly,
7. There is no central control,
8. The elements self-organize, that is, change the relationships between themselves to adapt to changes in the environment,
9. The elements learn from history, and from the environment, and adapt accordingly to ensure the survival of the system.

Teal organizations are run by self-managing teams. These teams consist of workers who each fulfill certain roles, including functional and managerial duties. All decisions are made using a simple advice process and/or a conflict resolution process when appropriate. There is no centralized control. Values are no longer given perfunctory attention but are actually lived in how people behave in the organization. Everyone listens to the organization's purpose and takes action accordingly while sensing for changes in the environment. Out of these collective actions, the behavior of the organization emerges.

Please leave your [feedback](#) regarding the usefulness of the wiki, in order for the voluntary team to improve it over time!

Notes and references

1. [Jump up](#) This stage corresponds to Gebser's "Integral," Loevinger's "Integrated," Cook-Greuter's "Construct-Aware," Kegan's "Inter-individual," Torbert's "Strategist" and "Alchemist," Graves' "AN," Spiral Dynamics' "Yellow," Maslow's "Self-actualization," Wade's "Authentic," and others; it is often referred to as integral.
2. [Jump up](#) To oversimplify: people who see the world differently are weaklings to be taken advantage of (Red), heretics to be brought back to the one true way (Blue), fools who don't know how to play the game of success (Orange), or intolerant people who won't give everyone a voice (Green). Source: Laloux, Frederic (2014-02-09). Reinventing Organizations: A Guide to Creating Organizations Inspired by the Next Stage of Human Consciousness (Kindle Locations 6912-6914). Nelson Parker. Kindle Edition.
3. [Jump up](#) Laloux, Frederic (2014-02-09). Reinventing Organizations: A Guide to Creating Organizations Inspired by the Next Stage of Human Consciousness (Kindle Location 1097-1107). Nelson Parker. Kindle Edition.

4. [Jump up↑](#) A Simpler Way, by Margaret J Wheatley and Myron Kellner-Rodgers (Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 1999) is a simple but beautiful treatise on Teal consciousness in organizations.
5. [Jump up↑](#) Laloux, Frederic (2014-02-09). Reinventing Organizations: A Guide to Creating Organizations Inspired by the Next Stage of Human Consciousness (Kindle Location 1108-1119). Nelson Parker. Kindle Edition.
6. [Jump up↑](#) Laloux, Frederic (2014-02-09). Reinventing Organizations: A Guide to Creating Organizations Inspired by the Next Stage of Human Consciousness (Kindle Location 1121-1134). Nelson Parker. Kindle Edition.
7. [Jump up↑](#) Source:23 Parker Palmer, Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 5.
8. [Jump up↑](#) Laloux, Frederic (2014-02-09). Reinventing Organizations: A Guide to Creating Organizations Inspired by the Next Stage of Human Consciousness (Kindle Location 1136-1157). Nelson Parker. Kindle Edition.
9. [Jump up↑](#) Laloux, Frederic (2014-02-09). Reinventing Organizations: A Guide to Creating Organizations Inspired by the Next Stage of Human Consciousness (Kindle Location 1158-1167). Nelson Parker. Kindle Edition.
10. [Jump up↑](#) Laloux, Frederic (2014-02-09). Reinventing Organizations: A Guide to Creating Organizations Inspired by the Next Stage of Human Consciousness (Kindle Location 1169-1177). Nelson Parker. Kindle Edition.
11. [Jump up↑](#) Ken Wilber makes the critical distinction between stages of consciousness and states of consciousness. States refer to the ephemeral, passing type of consciousness, while stages are longer-lasting structures that people grow into. States include waking consciousness, dreaming, sleeping, altered states (induced for instance by meditation, hypnosis, psychodrama, or drugs) and peak states of mystical experience. (Wilber generally uses the categorizations of gross, subtle, causal, witnessing, and non-dual). States and stages sometimes get confused, because the language of peak experience is often similar to the language that describes the highest stages, but they are two distinct properties of consciousness (with quadrants, lines, and types being third, fourth, and fifth properties in Wilber's integral model). Say someone has a state of peak mystical experience while generally operating from the Conformist-Amber stage: the peak state does not propel the person to bypass the Orange, Green, Teal, and subsequent stages of development to reach the top of the ladder. The person is still operating from Amber, as will be clear when he or she is again in a state of waking consciousness. Wilber and Combs have found evidence that any state can be experienced at every stage. For instance, people can take up meditative and other altered state practices at any stage. From Teal onward, there is a marked interest in taking up regular practices of non-ordinary consciousness to access the full spectrum of human experience. Source: Laloux, Frederic (2014-02-09). Reinventing Organizations: A Guide to Creating Organizations Inspired by the Next Stage of Human Consciousness (Kindle Locations 6916-6927). Nelson Parker. Kindle Edition.

12. [Jump up](#) Laloux, Frederic (2014-02-09). Reinventing Organizations: A Guide to Creating Organizations Inspired by the Next Stage of Human Consciousness (Kindle Location 1179-1207). Nelson Parker. Kindle Edition.
13. [Jump up](#) Laloux, Frederic (2014-02-09). Reinventing Organizations: A Guide to Creating Organizations Inspired by the Next Stage of Human Consciousness (Kindle Location 1209-1224). Nelson Parker. Kindle Edition.
14. [Jump up](#) Laloux, Frederic (2014-02-09). Reinventing Organizations: A Guide to Creating Organizations Inspired by the Next Stage of Human Consciousness (Kindle Location 1225-1234). Nelson Parker. Kindle Edition.
15. [Jump up](#) Laloux, Frederic (2014-02-09). Reinventing Organizations: A Guide to Creating Organizations Inspired by the Next Stage of Human Consciousness (Kindle Location 1235-1242). Nelson Parker. Kindle Edition.
16. [Jump up](#) Laloux, Frederic (2014-02-09). Reinventing Organizations: A Guide to Creating Organizations Inspired by the Next Stage of Human Consciousness (Kindle Locations 1299-1303). Nelson Parker. Kindle Edition.
17. [Jump up](#) Complex adaptive systems are self-organizing systems that shows behavior which cannot be inferred from the behavior of their elements. Melanie Mitchell in *Complexity, A Guided Tour*, defines a complex adaptive system as "a system in which large networks of components with no central control and simple rules of operation give rise to complex collective behavior, sophisticated information processing and adaptation via learning or evolution" (p13). Human beings are perfect examples of complex adaptive systems: The behavior of our brains, hands, feet, lungs, heart, etc., seen individually, does not indicate what our behavior will be. However, non-animate systems can also exhibit complex, adaptive behavior, for example the economy or a stock exchange. For a fuller discussion of organizations as complex adaptive systems, readers can refer to Margaret J. Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science*, 3rd Ed., Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2006 and to Elizabeth McMillan, *Complexity, Management and the Dynamics of Change*, Routledge, 2008. Melanie Mitchell's *Complexity, A Guided Tour* (Oxford University Press, 2009) is also an excellent layman's introduction to the science of complex adaptive systems.

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