

CONTEMPORARY MODELS OF ORGANIZATIONAL MANAGEMENT: REFLECTIONS ON ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE ACCORDING TO FREDERIC LALOUX

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Purpose: The aim of the article is a comparative description of contemporary models of organization management, taking into account the issue of organizational culture, humanistic management style and the colors of organization management, which was proposed by Frederic Laloux.

Design/methodology/approach: The article employs the method of descriptive and comparative analysis.

Findings: The analyses carried out in the text have demonstrated that the level of organizational culture depends on the preferred value system in the organization. It also confirmed the thesis that the level of awareness of an organization's employees is determined not only by the value systems preferred in the organization, but also by the decision-making styles associated with these values, preferred thinking patterns and the level of communication.

Research limitations/implications: The research hypotheses adopted in the publication have been limited only to the characteristics of the organization according to the division proposed by Frederic Laloux.

Practical implications: The article shows the path of changes that are currently taking place in business organizations. These changes have a significant impact on professional practice. They are related to the level of development of human consciousness and the prevailing (oppressive or non-oppressive) communication patterns: the less oppressive, more assertive and empathetic communication in the organization, the higher the level of employee well-being.

Social implications: The article addresses the problem of the role and importance of the humanities. At the center of the humanistic style of management there is always a human being, aware of obligations towards other people/co-workers and corporate social responsibility.

Originality/value: The aim of the article is to show the qualitative impact of the humanities on contemporary management styles of organizations representing different value systems, and thus also different axiological levels. Currently, the reflection on the axiology of the Pluralistic Green and Evolutionary Teal organizations is of particular importance, because it is the organizations from the level of green and teal that put a person open to dialogue and the broadly understood idea of humanity at the center of management.

Keywords: organizational culture towards the humanistic form of management, awareness of the color of the organization, oppressive and empathetic/non-oppressive communication, value system, Frederic Laloux.

Category of the paper: Conceptual paper, Viewpoint.

1. Introduction

The article, using the method of descriptive and comparative analysis, characterizes the problem of contemporary models of organization management. I focus mainly on the momentous concept of Frederic Laloux – a former politician, and now an advisor and leadership coach supporting corporate leaders. Frederic Laloux was the first to create an innovative model of organization taking into account the level of development of human consciousness. It is necessary to add that the very well-known, gradational model of Laloux is not evolutionary. Thus, Laloux only indicates that there are organizations operating at different axiological levels. Laloux includes extensive empirical research (based on surveys, interviews and examples of specific organizations) in his book *Reinventing Organizations*. Currently, Laloux mainly helps those who, while pursuing their careers in the field of business, want to learn about new, pioneering ways of building business organizations, taking into account the organizational culture (See: Rutkowska, 2020, pp. 17-22; Laloux, 2022).

„Culture as a creative process is subject to constant changes, but its role is always to serve values, build models, guard ideals and imponderables, shape and consolidate social, customary, moral norms and ethical canons” (Gaweł, 2015, p. 170). Nowadays, there is a desire for a systematic „restitution of autotelic values in the mental space of management” (Gaweł, 2015, p. 172). The necessity of restitution, as a restoration of the primary/highest values, is confirmed by the Polish theatre and cultural scholar Professor Emil Orzechowski, who accepts the postulate: „First values, then management” (See: Orzechowski, 2013, pp. 75-86; Gaweł, 2015, p. 171). Values are therefore a primary and irreducible component of management. Their constant presence is required especially when we think about the business organizational culture and the well-being of employees who contribute to this culture.

Currently, the key element of the organizational culture is also the growing awareness of employees. Most often, this awareness is shaped by the organization’s leading values, as well as specific employee beliefs, unwritten or routine norms and rules, and commonly accepted ways of doing things. As a consequence, „each organization develops its own particular way of operating, which creates a specific social order, determining the dominant approach to problems, work and customers” (Heidtman, Piasecki, 2022, p. 216).

2. Organizational culture in the face of contemporary management models

Organizational culture is an extremely important aspect of creating a company, related, among other things, to the vision and mission of the company and clear communication of the values guiding this company. Among the factors defining the organizational culture, there are

also the internal atmosphere of the organization, the level of employee engagement and satisfaction, employee habits, attitudes and the axiological context, i.e. the value system/axiological system prevailing in the organization. In general, organizational culture is defined by a set of internal organizational practices, especially activities that strengthen trust, as well as norms regulating cooperation. In order to build a non-oppressive organizational culture, „it is necessary to provide quality feedback to subordinates, support employees in their development and, as they self-improve, also increase their independence, which will also have a positive impact on employee self-esteem [...]. Strengthening partner relations and trust in the workplace [...], is an extremely important element of organizational culture that fosters the well-being of employees” (Tyszkiewicz, 2024).

3. Division of the organization according to the Frederic Laloux model

The well-being of an employee in the workplace depends on many factors, among which the dominant way of making decisions in the organization, consistency of values, as well as the style of communication and the ability to satisfy the need for self-fulfillment deserve to be distinguished. The distinguished factors depend on the prevailing paradigm in the organization. Most often, organizational paradigms, as patterns of thinking, are arranged gradually and indicate the value systems present in organizations. This is the case with the division proposed by Frederic Laloux. Laloux lists five such thinking patterns symbolically, marking each of these patterns with a specific color.

3.1. The paradigm of Impulsive Red

Frederic Laloux places red organizations at the bottom of the hierarchy. In organizations from the level of red, there is an oppressive style of communication. A characteristic feature of this level of communication is the impact of fear and the use of veiled, periphrastic mobbing behaviors towards co-workers. An employee of a red organization focuses on surviving in unfavorable conditions, including everyday functioning in a professional environment that does not inspire trust. This environment is unpredictable, even dangerous, because it uses ostracism without inhibition, as well as repressive measures in the form of open violence and threats. Examples of such oppressive behavior most often include suggesting dismissal, ignoring a subordinate employee combined with his or her professional isolation, incrimination, slander and blaming responsibility. Laloux claims that the Impulsive Red paradigm is dominated by a primitive emotional spectrum expressed in the use of force and violence in interpersonal relationships, including the demand for employee submission and the frequent tantrums of the superior.

The metaphor for red organizations is „a pack of wolves, because just as the alpha male uses force to maintain its position as leader in the wolf pack, the head of the organization belonging to the Impulsive Red level uses ruthless violence to subjugate others to his or her own will. Only in this way can they maintain their leadership status. When their power is questioned, immediately someone else will try to overthrow them using the method of force” (Laloux, 2022, p. 26).

Behaviors typical of the Impulsive Red organization today occur in economically disadvantaged regions, most often in confrontational societies, also in chaotic and primitive antagonistic, aggressive and adversarial environments. Examples of such places are areas of struggle for influence, zones of civil wars, bankrupt states, penitentiaries and urban districts of violence. Employees of the Impulsive Red paradigm organization focus on the present and immediate response to dangerous, uncertain, and threatening situations. Red Organizations openly give up building a permanent strategic base, while the employee of such an organization focuses on surviving in an untrustworthy and deceptive environment (Laloux, 2022, pp. 26-27).

3.2. The Paradigm of Conformist Amber

The second level in Laloux’s hierarchy is Conformist Amber. Amber-level organizations are also dominated by an unfriendly form of communication manifested in extremely directive management, for example, in management in the style of an overbearing satrap who gives orders and orders or a manager who motivates his or her subordinate employee by arousing a sense of guilt, shame and fear in this employee. An employee of an amber organization is driven by a strong need for internalization, i.e. absorbing the rules and principles of this organization. These rules and principles, as regular practices, are established by the authorities. They take the form of imperatives. They determine the *status quo* of the organization, they are constant and stable. As patterns of constant conduct, these imperatives constitute foreseeable circumstances/situations. According to the interpretation proposed by Frederic Laloux, employees of amber organizations „internalize the norms of the group, and their thinking is dominated by concern for appropriate appearance, behavior and thoughts in order to fit into the environment” (Laloux, 2022, p. 28).

The need for internalization in Conformist Amber organizations is clarified by coach and mediator Ewa Mazul, who claims that in organizations from the amber level, „the experience of security that comes from belonging to a group and the sense of connection that is created thanks to this is available. The goal is no longer just survival, but a relatively stable life in a group” (Mazul, 2020, p. 59). This Amber attitude is echoed by the statement of systems theorist Ken Wilber, who writes that in Conformist Amber „care and concern are extended from the individual to the group – but no further! So if you’re a member of a group – a member of my mythology, my ideology – then you’re also saved. But if you belong to a different culture, a different group, a different mythology, a different god, then you are damned” (Wilber, 1996, p. 273; Laloux, 2022, p. 29).

In the organization of the amber type, as in the organization of Impulsive Red, dualistic thinking dominates, but it is not – typical for the color red – egocentric thinking: I – you, mine – yours, but the dualism of ethnocentric thinking: us – them. Laloux believes that „amber’s conformist sensitivity develops a deeper sensitivity to other people’s feelings and to their points of view” (Laloux, 2022, p. 28). Among the amber organizations, Laloux distinguishes government agencies, public schools, religious institutions and military organizations (See: Laloux, 2022, p. 30).

3.3. Orange of Achievement as a paradigm of competence and purpose

The third level in the Laloux hierarchy are the Orange of Achievement organizations. Organizations from the orange level are characterized by a strong and assertive communication style related to the focus on achieving ambitious goals and competition. The competitive and competitive work environment of Orange of Achievement requires the acquisition of the ability to change the form of communication from submissive, aggressive and manipulative to polite, precise, firm and straightforward communication. In such conditions, the majesty of the authoritarian ruler falls in favor of science and empirical experience. Therefore, „in order to survive and not fall out of the race for goods in the structures of orange, it is necessary to be ready to compete and take on challenges, the ability to »play as a team«, a focus on development and openness to innovation” (Mazul, 2020, p. 47). In orange, the readiness to compete is therefore associated with the acceptance of change, as well as the rejection of violent and manipulative activities, and the fruitful cooperation of the rival parties (See: Janik, 2019).

According to Laloux, the orange paradigm of achievement allows meritocracy as a division based on skills and competences, while at the same time accepting the depreciation of authority, the questioning of the ethical norms of the group, and the critique of the inherited *status quo*. Nowadays, the Orange of Achievement manifests itself mainly in the circles of educated people, in business circles and politics. „The Orange of Achievement is the dominant paradigm of business corporations” (Laloux, 2022, p. 50). Unfortunately, the orange organizational culture also smacks of some shortcomings/flaws. So in no way should we trivialize the negative side of the orange pattern of thinking. These adverse aspects of Orange of Achievement manifest themselves in corporate greed, the corporate rat race, short-sightedness, over-borrowing, financial burdens, and ever-increasing debt, as well as hyperconsumption, ecosystem destruction, and irresponsible exploitation of the planet’s resources. Laloux adds that „this should not, however, obscure the enormous liberation that this stage has brought us; namely, the Orange of Achievement moved away from the view that only correct answers are the domain of power [...], brought a healthy dose of skepticism [...], allowed us to engage in the search for truth – regardless of dogma, political authorities and without risking our lives” (Laloux, 2022, p. 35).

3.4. The paradigm of Pluralistic Green

Communication processes in organizations from the green level are shaped and conditioned by a system of shared values. Among these values, family values deserve special attention, as well as the ability to listen empathically to oneself and others. In the paradigm of green, the community of family and empathic values determines the motivational processes of employees who are subordinate to a supportive and charismatic leader. Therefore, it is considered that „the green level is associated with a breakthrough in the approach to work organization – interpersonal relationships and the awareness that the needs of all people are as important at work as they are in the family begin to matter” (Mażul, 2020, p. 49). All activities at the level of the green color relate the sphere of human values, feelings and needs. Employees of green organizations are, above all, responsible and passionate people who should inspire each other. For this reason, any discussion at the green level takes into account a management strategy that refers to corporate social responsibility (CSR) (See: Demków, Sulich, 2018, pp. 73-84).

According to Laloux, the green culture of the organization is co-created by values and an inspiring purpose. „In many cases, green organizations put an inspiring purpose at the heart of what they do” (Laloux, 2022, p. 47). The perspective of a green organization is associated with interpersonal egalitarianism, appreciation of harmony, harmony, lasting relationships, cooperation and recognition of the values of community. In organizations, the tone of the green color is given by the empowerment of the employee, while the role of hierarchy is diminished, or both hierarchy and authority are consciously abandoned. Pluralistic Green is characterized by sensitivity focused on people and their feelings. Laloux believes that the axiological pluralism of the green organization „is strongly present in postmodern academic thinking” (Laloux, 2022, p. 43). According to Laloux, in addition to universities, specific examples of green organizations are also the American airline Southwest Airlines, the trading company Ben & Jerry, as well as DaVita – a leader in pro-health care and innovative forms of treatment (Laloux, 2022, pp. 47, 49).

3.5. The paradigm of Evolutionary Teal

The highest level in the hierarchy of the organization, according to Frederic Laloux’s scheme, is currently occupied by Evolutionary Teal. A characteristic feature of teal organizations is the form of communication based on empathy, related to the Nonviolent Communication (NVC) method. The NVC method is an excellent tool for building relationships and at the same time listening, used in companies using the method of two-way communication in the form of mediation or negotiation. Nonviolent communication (NVC), as a method of communication characteristic of teal organizations, „teaches how to build deep and honest relationships at work, listen to others with empathy, while honestly expressing one’s needs. »Don’t be nice or rude – be authentic« – this is an approach that we can implement by practicing

NVC principles in communication” (Mażul, 2020, p. 51; See: Berendt, Kozak, 2022, pp. 29-31, 43).

In addition to the empathetic form of communication, the teal turn in the organization of work manifests itself in self-improvement and self-management identified with the lack of external management. This means that „in the previous stages, there was always a »captain of the ship« – a satrap, a boss, and then a leader. Meanwhile, a teal company is fundamentally different from previous forms of organization in that it is based on the cooperation of independent and responsible people who have a highly developed need for self-fulfillment and want to satisfy it also at work” (Mażul, 2020, p. 50).

Laloux begins his characterization of the self-managing Evolutionary Teal by recalling the postulate of the American futurologist John Naisbitt (1929-2021), who stated that „we must learn to balance the material wonders of technology with the satisfaction of the spiritual needs of our human nature” (Naisbitt, 1997, p. 63), because „the most exciting turns of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries will happen not because of technology, but because of the expanding concept, what it means to be human” (Wzorek, 2024). The teal level, as the highest level in the hierarchy proposed by Laloux, captures a person holistically, taking into account his or her body, head, heart and mind. This level, also called the authentic or integral level, thus allows us to create a space to listen to „the wisdom that flows from the deeper parts of ourselves” (Laloux, 2022, p. 59).

Laloux claims that by functioning in the axiological perspective of teal, we are in a way reversing the existing order, because „we no longer strive for recognition, success, wealth and belonging to lead a good life, but we strive for a life well lived, and its result can be recognition, success, wealth and love” (Laloux, 2022, p. 60). Teal is therefore associated with the possibility of satisfying the need for self-fulfilment. According to Waldemar Kozłowski, self-fulfillment is one of the most important employee values today, giving a sense of agency, and giving a person the opportunity for self-fulfillment is winning their heart (See: Kozłowski, 2022, p. 94; See: Stanković, 2022). Suffice it to say that this need is at its highest level in the sequence of Abraham Maslow’s (1908-1970) needs¹. The teal need for self-realization is complemented by the sense of subdued fear of the ego, finding one’s own conviction of rightness as a compass, identifying life with the road and journey, the ability to gently cope with adversities, the ability to combine wisdom not only with analytical intellect and rationality, but also with emotional intuition, striving for wholeness, both in relation to oneself, in contacts with others, as well as in correlation with nature/nature and holistic building of oneself and one’s life based on one’s own potential (See: Laloux, 2022, pp. 59-68; Żukowska, 2023, pp. 74-111; See: Bugdol, Stańczyk, 2021).

¹ Abraham Maslow in his pyramid/hierarchy of needs, counting from the bottom up, takes into account: physiological needs, the need for security, the need for belonging, the need for recognition and the need for self-fulfillment.

4. Levels of communication – levels of organization

The described organizations, operating at different color levels, are characterized by language mechanisms prevailing in them, established and characteristic for a given level. The ability to diagnose communication styles is associated with the development of specific infiltration skills, i.e. reconnaissance, thanks to which we catch complex mechanisms of using a specific communication style by interlocutors. These reconnaissance abilities are associated with the proficiency in separating oppressive and non-oppressive statements, separating aggressive and subjugating linguistic mechanisms, present and overtly used in organizations, as well as the use of an effective antidote to the mechanisms/tools of exerting pressure systematically used in organizations (See: Mażul, 2020, p. 42).

The way you manage your organization depends on your communication style. In other words, the dominant communication style in an organization determines how the organization is managed. The style of communication depends on the level of development of the consciousness of the communicators. We reach the next stages of consciousness development by choosing not a revolutionary, but an evolutionary path of cyclical changes. In the process of systematic awareness, the ongoing evolution „is a guarantee of the development of consciousness and the related transition to the next, higher level of work organization. It should be added that this evolution goes from the most violent ways of using language in interpersonal relationships to non-violent mechanisms based on empathy” (Mażul, 2020, p. 42). These violent and oppressive forms of communication dominate in red and amber organizations. Assertive communication is at the forefront in orange organizations, while green and teal organizations focus on the value of empathy and an empathetic form of communication.

The path of empathic contact is consent to partner with another person, it is also about designing a space of consent and acceptance to see their life: feelings and needs behind the words of a specific person. „Being there for someone and their feelings doesn't mean we feel the same. This means that we give the other person our full attention and presence” (Berent, Kozak, 2022, p. 243). In the process of these evolutionary communicative transformations, or rather transformations of language mechanisms prevailing in organizations, systems of strengthening the motivation and inspiring of employees are created (See: Mażul, 2020, p. 42). A professional motivational process should therefore be in harmony with the norms and values that are, in a way, the backbone of the company. It should be realized that building an effective motivational process takes years, and it is determined, among other things, by the type of leadership (See: Sierackiewicz, 2016, pp. 18-23; See: Stańczyk, 2013, pp. 104-108); to no less, also employee potential, the level of communication, the organization's capabilities, changes in the organization's external environment, as well as the organizational culture described earlier (See: Kozłowski, 2022, p. 15).

5. Conclusion

The subject of analysis in this article are contemporary models of organization management according to the color division of organizations by Frederic Laloux. The research characteristics took into account the issue of building organizational culture and the horizon of values preferred in organizations. The analyses confirm the thesis that the value system preferred in the organization determines the level occupied by the organization in the Laloux hierarchy of levels. It was also verified that the level of awareness of an organization's employees is determined not only by the values preferred in the organization, but also by the decision-making styles associated with these values, the preferred thinking patterns in the company and the level of communication.

The considerations undertaken in the article also show the role of the humanities in the creation of organizations with a humanistic management style. The research shows that the humanistic management style to a certain, albeit small, extent is already revealed in the Orange of Achievement organizations, while it dominates in organizations from the level of Pluralistic Green and Evolutionary Teal. In these organizations, humanistic management becomes a source of inspiring transformations, focused on the person/employee and their well-being.

The ways of presenting the humanistic style of management are varied. There is no doubt that the humanistic style of management is always centered on an emancipated man, aware of his or her obligations towards other people. Therefore, it can be assumed that the basis of the humanistic style of management is the Kantian categorical imperative, according to which man should never become a means to ends, for example, „such as profit, economic growth or efficiency” (Kostera, 2015, p. 53). Man is an autotelic value, and therefore he is an end in himself. At the same time, it is a relational being. For this reason, management in the humanistic perspective should take into account both the individual and the social, especially the social, relational and community dimension of their existence. The socio-community dimension of life takes into account the cultural context and human „sensitivity to political, historical and ethical traditions” (Kostera, 2015, p. 54). Therefore, in order for this humanistic style of management to be fully realized, priority must be given to humanity and to man in their holistic approach.

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