

# Can Teal Practices Increase Employees' Work Engagement?

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**Abstract:** Because engaged employees work with passion, in deep connection with their company and are innovative, they may drive their organization's performance. Teal organizations, which implement original and inspiring ways of working, appear particularly favourable to create and support engagement in the long run. The aim of this paper is twofold: first, to study engagement drivers and barriers among many organizational dimensions, and secondly to characterize Teal Organization through their practices. We also hypothesize that Teal practices may drive employees' engagement. To this aim, we built a questionnaire and performed a cross-industry survey in France. The survey included a standardized measure of engagement, an assessment of organizational structure, management, leadership styles and social climate based on scholarly literature, and a series of questions dealing with Teal practices that we designed. The sample was composed of 767 respondents on behalf of their company. Using multiple regression analysis, we observe that engagement is predicted by social openness of the company and by organizational trust. Teal practices aggregate in a statistically reliable manner into a construct that we call Teal index. If Teal index is not a direct predictor of engagement, it appears to contribute to predicting trust, which itself predicts engagement. These results are insightful in many ways: they highlight trust as a key factor of engagement, offer a first overview of the adoption of Teal practices among French companies and open up avenues for capturing Teal philosophy beyond observable and measurable practices in everyday corporate life. These findings are discussed with an evolutionary viewpoint to better understand current and future transformation of organizations.

**Keywords:** Work engagement, Teal practices, Organizational trust, Transformational leadership

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## 1. Teal Practices as Engagement Drivers

### 1.1 Work Engagement and Organizational Factors

In psychological literature, engagement is defined as a positive and fulfilling work-related state of mind (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004; Schaufeli, 2013). Engagement is characterized by vigor, dedication and absorption.

Vigor means showing a strong determination and energy when working, willing to carry out projects voluntarily and finding resources when experiencing difficulties. Dedication generates enthusiasm when working, as well as pride, inspiration, and turns work into a challenge. A dedicated person is able to get involved beyond what is expected. Absorption corresponds to a high level of concentration. In this state, individuals lose sense of time and may have difficulties stopping their activity. Absorption can be related to flow, as defined by Csikszentmihalyi (1990): effortless concentration, time distortion, body and mind unity (Šimleša *et al.*, 2018). However Flow is of short duration contrary to engagement (Rottemberg, 2021).

Work engagement has been extensively studied, in various countries and various industries (Motyka, 2018). It is a good predictor of numerous indices of performance at individual, team or organizational levels (Motyka, 2018). The annual Gallup reports on engagement have probably contributed to the diffusion of this concept among non-academic audiences such as companies and managers (Gallup, 2013, 2023). Engagement being a subject of interest for both academics and practitioners, the identification of its drivers and barriers among organisational structure, management, leadership or social climate is highly valuable.

Organizational structure, management and leadership styles provide guidance on how a company operates. As for structures, one can roughly categorize them into hierarchical, functional, matrix or network structures (Rottemberg, 2021). Regarding management, Hersey-Blanchard Situational Theory, which was first published in 1969 (Hersey and Blanchard, 1969b, 1969a), is still used today (Meirovich and Gu, 2015). This theory explores two dimensions of management: a human-centred one and a task-centred one. These two axes bring out four areas, corresponding to four management styles: directing (task orientation without human orientation), coaching (task and human orientations), participating (human orientation without task orientation), and delegating (low human and low task orientations). Finally, leadership is unrelated to management, seniority or hierarchical position in the company. It is a social influence process enabling individuals to achieve their goals (Kruse, 2013). To describe leadership, the transformational/transactional model proposed by Bass (Bass, 1990; Avolio and Bass, 2001) appears to be especially relevant. The transformational leader inspires employees through values where the transactional leader motivates by giving rewards and punishments. Transformational leadership was shown to increase engagement of employees and teams, innovation, psychological well-being and general performance (Boudrias, Brunelle and d'Amours, 2015).

Social climate corresponds to the interaction between employees and organisation. It is measured by employees' perception of practices and relationships at work. The concept of social climate takes its origins in Lewin's (1951) model which emphasizes the role of the environment, and not only the individual, on work. Social climate appeared to be linked to the way employees are treated, guided and managed (Litwin and Stringer, 1968). Social climate can be approached through organizational trust, social openness, and social dialog for example. All these concepts apply to classical contemporary organizations, but they may not have applied to organizations from the distant past and may not apply to organizations in the distant future, in which major foundations such as hierarchy, management or structure may disappear.

## **1.2 Teal Organizations**

In his book *Reinventing Organizations*, Laloux (2014) describes an emergent kind of organization which implements original and inspiring ways of working. This type of organization seems to enhance employees' engagement. It is called Teal and is characterized by three organizational innovations. The first organizational innovation is individual wholeness seeking. It means that rationality and determination are no longer the only professional behaviours accepted, and that intuition and spirituality are welcomed. The second organizational innovation is self-management. It is characterized by the absence of hierarchy and the equality of relationship. Despite no hierarchy, no consensus is expected when deciding, which leads to a surprising efficiency (Laloux, 2014). The third innovation of the Teal stage is the organizational evolutionary purpose. A higher-order purpose, beyond economical concerns, is present in everyday situation, supports engagement and decision making. Profit is no more viewed as an end and not sought as such. The organization is perceived as an independent and living being, adapting to complex environment and showing high resiliency, which explains why the organizational purpose is called evolutionary.

Teal is one of the stages of an evolutionary model of organizations (Laloux, 2014), which also accounts for more contemporary stages of evolution, such as the Amber stage (i.e., conformist and stable structures with well-defined functions and processes, like many public administrations) and the Orange stage (which promotes innovation, responsibility, and meritocracy, like many multinationals). Green (fostering empowerment, inclusiveness, and meaningfulness) and Teal are more recent and marginal forms of organizations. The Orange stage, which flourished with the development of industry and is mainly driven by economic performance, is the more influencing stage in our contemporary society. Compared to Orange organizations, Teal organizations have developed new practices, and have left some others inherited from the Orange stage.

Although this model is not fully validated, it can be articulated with existing theoretical framework addressing organizational culture, psychogenesis and sociogenesis. This evolutionary model draws on theories of human development (Graves, 1970; Beck and Cowan, 1996; Wilber, 2000) which model individual psychological growth during lifetime through the alternation of individualistic and collectivist stages progressing from the satisfaction of physiological needs towards the satisfaction of highest psychological needs. In Laloux' model, the same applies to the stages of evolution of human organizations. This evolution at the organizational level is also in line with Inglehart's seminal work on cultural, economic and political change in post-industrial democracies (Inglehart, 2018). When economic security is satisfied, basic political priorities may naturally shift towards post materialism (e.g., increasingly rational, tolerant, trusting, and participatory values) and the fulfilment of individual and psychological needs (e.g., well-being, intellectual life, relatedness, aesthetics). Because of its evolutionary nature, Laloux' (2014) model completes existing models of organizational culture, which offer a picture of mainstream practices in a given time, for example the Competing Values Framework (Cameron and Quinn, 2011), the Organizational Culture Inventory (Cooke and Szumal, 2000), and the Organizational Culture Profile (O'Reilly III, Chatman and Caldwell, 1991). Some features of Teal organizations are accounted for in the previous models, but none of them includes the main Teal characteristic, the self-determined evolutionary purpose transcending economical concern.

Through Laloux' description of the Teal stage, 21 new practices and 8 disappearing ones were identified as new (Laloux, 2014). Concerning organizational structure, new practices appeared such as autonomous teams integrating support functions, while other practices disappeared as strong pyramidal structure, coordination via top-down meetings, or support functions provided by specialised departments. Concerning governance, decisions are made differently in Teal organizations. They do not require systematic hierarchy validation anymore, neither are they the sole responsibility of top management. Teal organizations invented a decentralised decision-making process based on an advice solicitation. As anyone can take a decision, Teal organization systematically manage conflicts using a definite process. This is a brand-new practice. Some other new practices proposed by Teal organizations are dealing with speech distribution; anyone can make his voice

heard, and egos are drained. Others are dealing with integrating newcomers, who benefits from a long immersion route throughout the organization and who are trained to soft skills and organizational culture. Finally Teal organizations also developed new practices also around their evolutionary purpose. Especially clear values arise out of it, known and recognised by anyone. In addition, explicit and protective rules of behaviour are set and shared among employees.

### **1.3 Research Questions and Hypotheses**

The **primary research question** deals with the existence and consistency of such a Teal stage of evolution and the existence of such Teal companies. If the occurrence and adoption of Teal practices appear to be linked and consistent with one another, they may well be the manifestation of a common underlying phenomenon, namely a new organizational paradigm. Conversely, if Teal practices are not linked to one another, this would challenge the evolutionary model. Hence according to our **Hypothesis H1**, the 29 Teal practices will statistically aggregate reliably into a single construct that we will call the Teal index.

A subsequent **exploratory research question** addresses the current state of adoption of Teal practices among French organizations. In this respect, we do not have a formal hypothesis to test, even if we assume that the Teal index will show relatively low.

Our **final aim** is to demonstrate the statistical relation between the Teal index and work engagement. In particular, we hypothesize (**Hypothesis H2**) that Teal index will exhibit a greater predictive power on engagement than traditional organizational and managerial practices. To inform these research questions and test these hypotheses, we performed a cross-industry survey in France.

## **2. Large-Scale Survey**

### **2.1 Sample**

767 French-speaking participants took the survey on behalf of their organization; the sample was composed of 50% women, 48% men and 2% persons who did not identify their gender. They were on average 28,14 years old (SD = 6,94). All of them were working for different companies, 85% in industry, 9% in construction and 6% in services to industry. 13% of their companies had less than 29 employees, 24% had between 50 and 249 employees, 23% had between 250 and 999 employees, and 40% counted more than 1000 employees. Respondents were all engaged in a one-year executive training program that they followed as initial or as continuing training in our institute and were recruited in this context. The participants filled out an online questionnaire during a one hour dedicated session, collaborating with their industrial mentor. 89 % of mentors had more than 5 years of service in their company, and 73% more than 10 years.

### **2.2 Material**

The survey included 87 items, associated to 7-point Likert-type scales. 29 items dealt with Teal practices, and 58 dealt with individual engagement and organizational context. We used validated scales as far as possible. 9 more items were dedicated to sample characterization.

Work engagement was measured through the UWES (Hollet, 2005; Schaufeli, Bakker and Salanova, 2006) with a reliability of  $\alpha = 0.638$  in our sample. Regarding organizational structure, we used 4 normalised organigrams (Figure 1), for which participants were asked to rate the extent to which they match their company's structure.

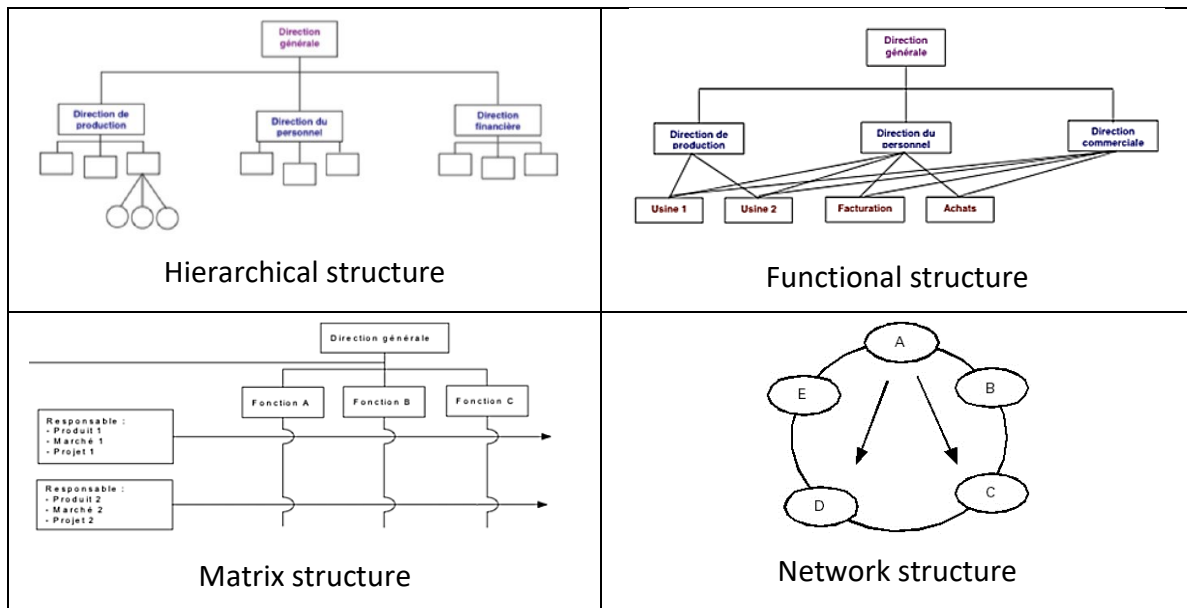


Figure 1: Flowcharts inserted in the survey to assess organizational structure

Management style assessment was based on four items referring to the four management styles from Hersey and Blanchard's (1969b) model. Leadership was measured on the one hand through MLQ-Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (Bass *et al.*, 2003) for transformational leadership style ( $\alpha = 0.895$ ), and through the leadership criteria ( $\alpha = 0.716$ ) of the EFQM questionnaire survey (Martín-Castilla and Rodríguez-Ruiz, 2008).

Social climate was approached through several concepts: social openness ( $\alpha = 0.818$ ) and task clarity ( $\alpha = 0.799$ ) from the organizational climate questionnaire (ECPA, 1984). Trust was measured through the four following items:

- Our line managers trust employees;
- ...ensure that employees have confidence in each other;
- ...ensure that employees have confidence in their superiors;
- We feel capable of achieving the objectives that are set for us.

And we measured values with the following items ( $\alpha = 0.793$ ):

- Company values are clearly identified.
- Managers tend to pass on company values to teams.
- The values come from top management and are relayed by managers, thus constituting the culture of the company.

Regarding Teal practices, based on Laloux' (2014) work, we designed the 29 following items, categorized into three sets:

*In terms of organization, in my company...*

- ... teams are fully autonomous - they do not receive instructions from a hierarchy and do not have to seek their approval.
- ...coaches, without responsibility for results or managerial authority, are available to support the teams.
- ...there is a very strong pyramidal structure. (inverted item)
- ...coordination takes the form of regular meetings at all levels, organised from top to bottom. (inverted item)
- ...specific services provide support functions: HR, IT, purchasing, finance, quality, security, etc. (inverted item)
- ...most support functions (HR, IT, purchasing, finance, quality, security, etc.) are provided within each team or through voluntary working groups, and not through specialized services.

Concerning human resources, in my company...

- ...Human Resources service and hierarchy carry out the job interviews. (inverted item)
- ...the applicant's future colleagues conduct hiring interviews.
- ...when onboarding, newcomers follow a substantial immersion route allowing him/her to discover the entire organization.
- ...any newcomer is thoroughly trained in interpersonal relationships and corporate culture.
- ...each employee, throughout his/her career, sets his/her base salary, and his/her colleagues adjust it if the assessment appears overestimated or underestimated.
- ...each employee tries to identify his/her vocation and questions his alignment with the purpose of the company.
- ... Personal time/working time balance is discussed frankly with each employee.
- ...there is a great deal of flexibility in working hours, provided that commitments are met.

In my company daily life...

- ... workspaces are warm, decorated by employees and open to children and/or animals and/or nature.
- ...workspaces strongly mark social status. (inverted item)
- ...everyone can make their voice heard, regardless of their role in the organization.
- ...specific approaches exist to hold off egos, especially during meetings.
- ...information is possessed by powerful persons who communicate it parcimoniously. (inverted item)
- ...all information is shared in real time with everyone, including financial and salary information.
- ...moments are planned to uncover and discuss conflicts.
- ...there is a structured process for conflict resolution.
- ...the values of the organization are clear and translated into explicit rules of behaviour. They promote a protective environment.
- ...there is a process for regularly questioning the rules.
- ...there are rest and meditation rooms for employees.
- ...we consciously seek to maintain a climate that will best serve the organization's raison d'être, particularly through foundational stories.
- ...decisions are all made at the top of the pyramid. (inverted item)

### 3. Results

#### 3.1 Hypothesis H1: Consistency of the Teal index

To test hypothesis H1, we computed both a Cronbach's alpha and a Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin index. Both proved very high:  $\alpha = 0.777$ ,  $KMO = 0.828$  ( $p < 0.001$ ), which confirms that the 29 practices we measured aggregate in a statistically reliable manner. Hence we can use a Teal index and study its distribution (see section 3.2.). To better inform the conceptual consistency of the index, we also studied how it correlates with organizational structures, management and leadership styles. The results (Table 1) notably show that the Teal index correlates negatively with a hierarchical pyramidal structure ( $r = -0.195$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and with a directing management ( $r = -0.366$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Conversely, it most strongly correlates with transformational leadership ( $r = 0.488$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

**Table 1: Correlation between the Teal index, organizational structures, management styles and transformational leadership. Positive significant correlations are highlighted in green, and negative significant correlations are highlighted in yellow**

		Organizational structure				Management style				Transformational leadership
		Hierarchical	Functional	Matrix	Network	Directing	Coaching	Participating	Delegating	
Correlation to Teal index	r	-0.195	0.103	0.147	0.216	-0.366	0.217	0.209	-0.047	0.488
	p	< 0.001	0.004	< 0.001	< 0.001	< 0.001	< 0.001	< 0.001	0.194	< 0.001

3.2 Distribution of the Teal Index

In line with our assumption, the Teal index in our sample of French companies amounts to  $M = 3.46$  ( $SD = 0.663$ ) on a 7-point scale and follows a normal distribution ( $SW(767) = 0.997$ ,  $p = 0.146$ ), although slightly shifted to the left (Figure 2).

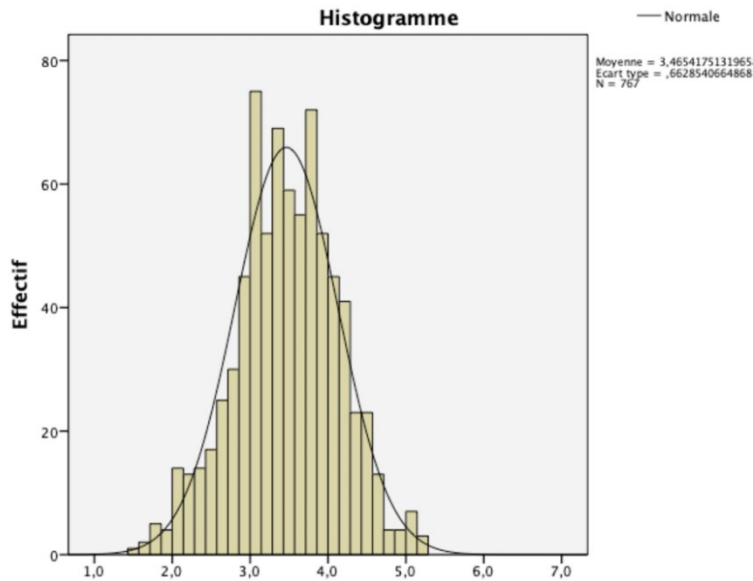


Figure 2: Teal index distribution

More specifically, Figure 3 details the mean and standard error of adoption of each Teal practice. It is clear that some of them are more widely adopted (e.g., possibility for anyone to make his voice heard, removal of social status signs, clarity of values, work/life balance, onboarding process) while others remain marginal (e.g., decentralization of support functions, self-determined wage, self-management).

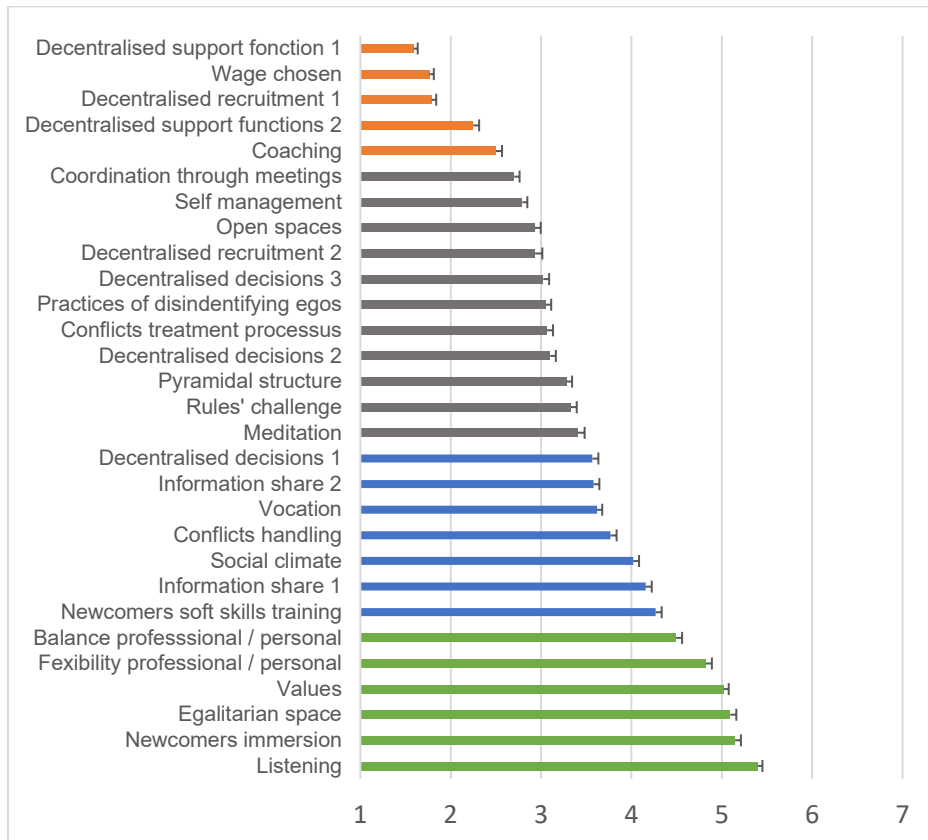


Figure 3: Mean and standard error of adoption of the 29 Teal practices among our sample

### 3.3 Hypothesis H2: The Drivers of Work Engagement

To test H2, we performed a multiple regression analysis with engagement as Dependent Variable, and all other variables as predictors, using SPSS 21. The results (see Table 2) highlight only two significant positive predictors: social openness ( $\beta = 0.242$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), and trust ( $\beta = 0.158$ ,  $p = 0.004$ ). Contrary to Hypothesis H2, the Teal index is not a significant predictor of work engagement.

**Table 2: Regression analysis with engagement as dependent variable. Positive significant predictors are highlighted in green, Teal index (Hypothesis H2) is highlighted in grey**

Model	A	Standard error	$\beta$	t	Sig.
(Constant)	2,992	0,328		9,111	0
Hierarchical structure	-0,014	0,019	-0,026	-0,742	0,458
Functional structure	-0,004	0,016	-0,008	-0,245	0,806
Matrix structure	0,026	0,016	0,055	1,601	0,11
Network structure	-0,028	0,02	-0,048	-1,368	0,172
Participating management	0,021	0,02	0,039	1,06	0,29
Directing management	-0,009	0,023	-0,015	-0,392	0,696
Delegating management	-0,029	0,02	-0,051	-1,46	0,145
Coaching management	-0,004	0,022	-0,006	-0,173	0,863
Social dialogue	-0,002	0,033	-0,002	-0,056	0,955
Teal index	-0,013	0,063	-0,008	-0,204	0,838
Transformational leadership	0,115	0,066	0,105	1,747	0,081
Trust	0,163	0,057	0,158	2,863	0,004
Values	0,035	0,052	0,036	0,676	0,499
Leadership	-0,049	0,038	-0,054	-1,304	0,192
Social openness	0,246	0,048	0,242	5,128	0
Task clarity	0,043	0,036	0,05	1,196	0,232
Innovation	0,003	0,029	0,004	0,099	0,921
<b>a. Dependent variable: ENGAGEMENT</b>					

### 3.4 Further Exploration

As trust appears to be a central concept, we performed a second round of analysis removing Engagement and including Trust as Dependent Variable. The results (see Table 3) highlight four significant positive predictors of trust: social dialogue ( $\beta = 0.088$ ,  $p = 0.002$ ), Teal index ( $\beta = 0.074$ ,  $p = 0.006$ ), transformational leadership ( $\beta = 0.594$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and task clarity ( $\beta = 0.139$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Transformational leadership appears to be by far the strongest predictor of trust ( $\beta = 0.594$ ).

**Table 3: Regression analysis with trust as dependent variable. Positive significant predictors are highlighted in green**

Model	A	Standard error	$\beta$	t	Sig.
(Constant)	0,671	0,21		3,203	0,001
Hierarchical structure	0	0,012	0	0,02	0,984
Functional structure	-0,003	0,01	-0,008	-0,339	0,735
Matrix structure	-0,011	0,01	-0,024	-1,036	0,3
Network structure	0,001	0,013	0,002	0,073	0,942

Model	A	Standard error	$\beta$	t	Sig.
Participating management	0,015	0,013	0,029	1,199	0,231
Directing management	-0,026	0,015	-0,046	-1,804	0,072
Delegating management	-0,006	0,013	-0,01	-0,44	0,66
Coaching management	0,022	0,014	0,038	1,543	0,123
Social dialogue	0,067	0,021	0,088	3,16	0,002
Teal index	0,112	0,041	0,074	2,759	0,006
Transformational leadership	0,634	0,036	0,594	17,866	0
Values	-0,018	0,033	-0,019	-0,538	0,591
Leadership	-0,033	0,024	-0,038	-1,365	0,173
Social openness	0,058	0,031	0,058	1,872	0,062
Task clarity	0,116	0,023	0,139	5,073	0
Innovation	0,009	0,019	0,012	0,469	0,639
<b>a. Dependent variable: Trust</b>					

#### 4. Discussion and Conclusion

This cross-industry study first enabled us to capture a common underlying phenomenon behind a series of disparate organizational practices, namely a Teal index (Hypothesis H1) possibly reflecting a shift in organizations' stage of evolution (Laloux, 2014). Beyond statistical reliability, the fact that Teal index correlates positively to transformational leadership and negatively to hierarchical and directing approaches supports the internal conceptual consistency of the philosophy behind the practices. As we had anticipated, the mean Teal index is relatively low in our sample of French companies (below the middle of the scale), which suggests that this stage of evolution is still an emerging trend in our country and that Teal companies remain marginal in French industrial landscape. However, the construction of this Teal index will enable us in the future to monitor the evolution of this trend in France or compare the state of evolution of several countries.

More specifically, the degree of adoption of each Teal practice may be of interest for several reasons: it gives an overview of the practices that may be more or less acceptable, more or less challenging or disruptive in the current time in France; it also provides valuable insights to select the practices that could be first introduced in a company willing to make its culture evolve, and possibly set out a transformation roadmap to introduce practices progressively, ensuring step-by-step internalization in a commitment process.

However, contrary to our Hypothesis H2, Teal practices are not direct drivers of work engagement. We identified only two significant predictors of engagement in our results: social openness and organizational trust. A second round of analyses suggested that Teal practices may contribute to organizational trust, which in turn determines work engagement. This set of findings inspires us two comments: firstly, introducing practices may not be sufficient to shape an organization towards Teal stage. This finding seems reasonable as practices may only be the external observable manifestations of a deeper corporate philosophy. Practices without the underlying philosophy could result in an empty inauthentic shell and be qualified of 'purpose washing' (Findlay and Moran, 2019). Secondly, to further understand the mechanisms of work engagement, it appears necessary to capture this Teal philosophy by itself, beyond its manifestation through practices. This calls for further development of a tool to measure for example the existence, place and role of an evolutionary purpose in the organization (main foundation of the Teal paradigm). The evolutionary purpose makes explicit the Why of the organization, its contribution to society, to world's or humanity's challenges. The social-openness variable, which proved to be a significant driver of engagement, measures organizational willingness to gain social and societal progress. To some extent, social openness could be considered as an indirect measure of the existence of an evolutionary purpose in the organization. Our Teal index and social openness variables do correlate strongly and positively indeed ( $r = 0.44$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). The evolutionary purpose, its implementation into practices and its use in everyday decision-making, may provide a strong motivational framework to the members of the organization and support meaningfulness at work. In this respect, it could appear to be a direct driver of work engagement, together with trust and social openness.



In addition to formalizing an evolutionary purpose and introducing innovative organizational practices, another driver of both the Teal stage of evolution, organizational trust and work engagement may be the transformational leadership style. Our results emphasize that it strongly correlates to the Teal index, is the main driver of organizational trust, and marginally increases work engagement. This leadership style mainly relies on an inspiring and optimistic long-term vision (analogous to an evolutionary purpose) and on the autonomy to let each one find how to contribute to achieving this vision (analogous to self-management in the Teal paradigm). Both from a conceptual viewpoint and from our study results, we may recommend developing this leadership style in order to implement a modern, healthy and responsible work environment.

The present study holds several limitations feeding our perspectives for future research. Firstly, the cross-industry section method relies on a single measurement point for each participating company. Despite statistical consistency that can be checked at the sample level, this method is insufficient to interpret the results at the company level. It can only be used to gain an overview of a phenomenon and assess big trends. Several complementary approaches exist to study more accurately the drivers of engagement in a given company, for example case studies in which many members of the same organization express their engagement level along with their individual perception of organizational and managerial factors. The latter method provides a more accurate view on a single organization, but the mechanisms identified cannot be generalized to other companies.

The present study also highlighted several limitations in our measurement tools: in the future, we will be able to deepen our analysis by focusing on the most important variables and removing those which may not be influential on work engagement. In particular, we intend to use a more fine-grained measure of organizational trust, develop a tool measuring the existence and weight of an evolutionary purpose, in a Teal sense, and assess its impact on trust, motivation and engagement at work.

The joint study of motivational and engagement processes at the individual level and of organizational factors at the company level may help us capture the core mechanisms contributing to the transformation of the workplace towards more wellbeing at work, meaningful contribution to society and more positive impact on the world, which all characterize the Teal paradigm.

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