

# Foundations, Principles and Inspirational Resources of **Integral Politics**

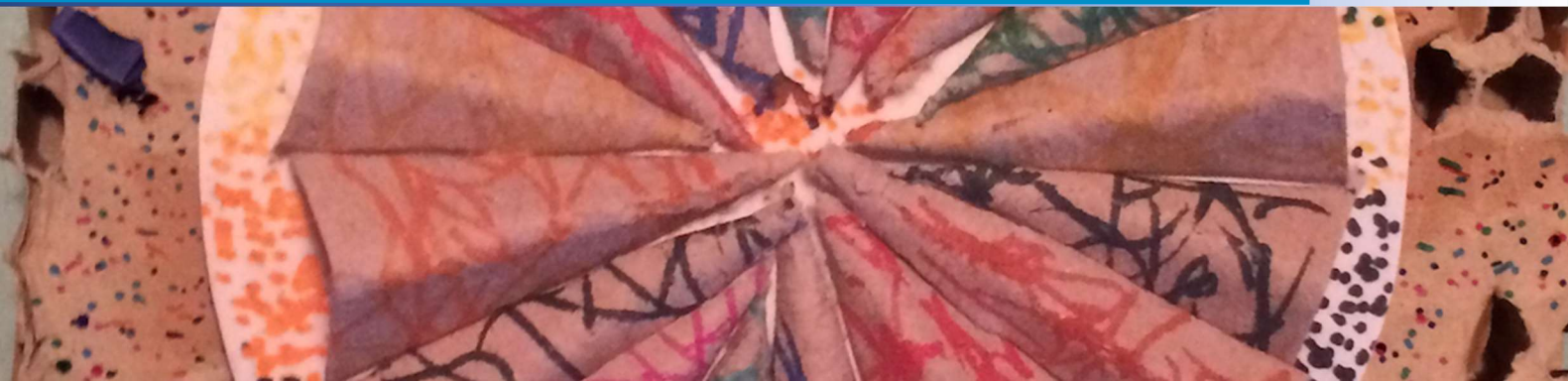


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## **6. Frederic Laloux: The TEAL Paradigm**

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## Chapter 6

### Frederic Laloux: *Reinventing Politics* based on the TEAL Paradigm

*Could it be that our current worldview limits the way we think about politics? Could we invent a more powerful, more soulful, more meaningful way to jointly care for and take decisions towards the common good, if only we change our belief system? (Adapted from Laloux, 2014: 2)*

A more recent and equally popular follow-up approach that has been **inspired by integral theory** – and extensively endorsed by Ken Wilber – is the work of the Belgian organizational consultant Frederic Laloux. It is driven by the observation of frustration and disillusionment about the degree to which many people lose their souls at their workplace. The experience of careers based on a fundamental disconnect with peoples’ deeper needs and longings, as well as with what would be good for their relationships and the planet, also connects with Otto Scharmer’s three fundamental divides, even if Laloux doesn’t mention them explicitly. His bestselling book “Reinventing Organizations” (2014) is the result of his search for alternatives. It describes what he observes as a **new, co-creative paradigm of designing and running organizations**, and which he explains as a product of the emerging integral or “TEAL” stage of consciousness. With implications in all four quadrants, the “TEAL” principles of organizing are an important inspiration for a new approach in politics, too.

#### Biographical notes

Interestingly, not much biographical information is available about Frederic Laloux. There are no Wikipedia articles, other than mentions connected to his book and work. Laloux insists that his message is not about his person, but about the new paradigm he is describing. However, Laloux has told his story in several interviews and presentations.



After completing MBA studies at INSEAD Business School (France), providing him with a background in management and organizational development, he worked for about 20 years as a business consultant and organizational coach, primarily with McKinsey. Over the years, he did what business consultants do, helping companies to increase or optimize their performance, with a strong focus on the financial bottom line.

During those years, he came across many examples of both leaders and employees who did not experience their work as fulfilling and meaningful anymore. “Being a top executive today is no longer fun”, he said in an interview. In many “open conversations with senior leaders behind closed doors”, they told Laloux about their “organizational disillusionment” in all areas, ranging from business to the health system to schools and others. “Working at the top of a company has degenerated into a ‘rat race’. Everyone is exposed to incredible pressure, which they all somehow try to endure. Basically, almost everyone is on the verge of burnout” (<https://www.egonzehnder.com/de/interview-mit-frederic-laloux>).

Therefore, at a certain point, Laloux reports that “deep inside myself, I felt there was something broken with these organizations, something profoundly unhealthy about the structures and the whole mind-set and consciousness of these organizations”. So “from one day to another, I stopped working with them” (interview with Michael Stone, <https://soundcloud.com/michaelstoneconversations/frederic-laloux>). He decided to quit his job and went on a quest for a new, more fulfilling kind of working together. With the question in mind, how business could be done differently and how cooperation could be organized in more joyful and productive ways, Laloux wondered what those of his former clients who had chosen to leave the “rat race” had started to do instead. So he went out to “look for these radical innovators” (ibid.).

On his quest for new ways of doing and organizing more purposeful work, he came across several dozen organizations that were already living what Laloux decided to call a “TEAL paradigm” of organizing. The result of two years of field work was his **book “Reinventing Organizations”**, first published in 2014. The book, endorsed by Ken Wilber in an extensive foreword, sold about 500.000 copies by 2022 and is considered one of the most groundbreaking books of the decade in the area of economy and business.

Today, Frederic Laloux lives in the Ecovillage Ithaca in the state of New York. Despite being a popular and much sought-after speaker, he prefers to spend a rather secluded life as a philosopher of new forms of business and economy, dedicating much of his time to his wife and two children. His automatic email reply reads: “If you ask me for a lecture or advice and don't get a reply within a week, please consider this the most polite form a No can take” (quoted after <https://www.egon-zehnder.com/de/interview-mit-frederic-laloux>). It is therefore safe to say, that Laloux lives what he preaches.

### *Essentials of Laloux’ concept of TEAL organizations in a nutshell*

Based on the observation that our dominant way of life and work is disconnecting us from ourselves, our fellow humans and, ultimately, from our natural environment (Otto Scharmer’s “three divides”, see chapter 5), Laloux’ concept of a **“TEAL” way of organizing** presents a solution that transcends this current paradigm. It is a result of applying Clare Graves’ model of cultural development as presented in Ken Wilber’s integral theory to the findings of two years of extensive field work and action research of his own.

Laloux builds up and illustrates his claim about a new paradigm inspired by a new, integral (or: TEAL) consciousness in the first three chapters of his book. Situating it in a “historical and developmental perspective” (Laloux, 2014: 11), he starts by first offering a vivid panorama of how organizational models have changed over time, from the beginnings of human socio-cultural evolution (100.000 – 50.000 years B.C.) up until our time. For each new level of existence as suggested by Clare Graves’ stage model, Laloux discusses the main breakthroughs, shadows and guiding metaphors of how people have typically viewed (and are still viewing) organization in the respective paradigms. Laloux’ perspective as an organizational developer and consultant adds considerable depth and concretion to Graves’ initial model as far as the evolution of organizations is concerned.

Second, Laloux dedicates a short chapter each to the principles inherent in complexity development (transcend and include), and to the currently emerging new level of consciousness. Following Wilber,

he calls it “TEAL”.<sup>1</sup> The latter is characterized by a shift from fear and deficit motivation to a strength, trust and abundance motivation, and by the desire to express one’s fullest potential in service of the larger whole.

Laloux then opens up the curtain to his rich collection of empirical observations, illustrating how various aspects of the integral/TEAL paradigm show up in the pioneering organizations he has studied. In a nutshell, Laloux found that **three core principles** are at the heart of the new TEAL paradigm of organizing which can be observed in all the cases he describes:

- self-management,
- striving for wholeness and
- listening to the evolutionary purpose of the organization.

Together, they transform the way that work and life are organized. The new guiding metaphor is that of “living systems” (Laloux, 2014: 55).

Note that Laloux’ characterization of the TEAL principles of organizing does not merely refer to the outer, visible form that an organization takes (Wilber’s Lower Right Quadrant). Rather, he holds that the new TEAL paradigm goes along with corresponding breakthroughs in all four quadrants: first and foremost a new level of consciousness (ULQ) and organizational culture (LLQ) which, in turn, bring forward specific practices, rituals and behaviors (URQ) shaping organizational life, that are held and scaffolded by its structures, rules and institutions.

For this “blueprint” of a TEAL organization to be fully functional, Laloux also discusses some crucial conditions and gives advice as to how to implement it in organizations that have previously worked according to different logics. Essentially, it needs to be endorsed and supported by the current leadership.

As to the question how the TEAL paradigm and worldview might transform society as a whole and hence, how they might translate to the domain of politics, Laloux’ only gives a few promising hints. – Up to us to elaborate.

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<sup>1</sup> Apparently, Laloux had asked Don Beck, co-author of “Spiral Dynamics”, for an endorsement or foreword first, but declined after Beck had demanded to be listed as a co-author of the whole book in return.

**Summary Box: Key concepts, claims and elements**

\* The **TEAL paradigm** is emerging as a new way of designing and running Organizations based on a more holistic, integral consciousness.

\* Book **“Reinventing Organizations”**: presents examples from over 12 organizations from across all sectors who have implemented different variations of the TEAL paradigm in their everyday work.

\* **Method**: Field work including intensive participant observation in multiple TEAL organizations.

\* **Core claims**:

- Our ways of organizing work evolves as our thinking becomes more complex. Each level of consciousness development (as of Clare Graves/Spiral Dynamics) has brought forward a new paradigm.

- The TEAL paradigm is characterized by a shift from fear/deficit motivation to strength, trust/abundance motivation, and by the desire to express one’s fullest potential in service of the larger whole.

\* **Essential principles of the TEAL paradigm**:

- **Self-management**: TEAL organizations have flat, functional hierarchies and trust their basic entities (teams) to fully self-organize. Those who are dealing with a problem/challenge are in charge of solving it. Yet, they must seek advice from others before taking a decision.

→ *Inspiration for politics*: decentralize decision-making and include the wisdom (and collective intelligence) of the crowd more flexibly and more systematically!

- **Wholeness**: Everyone is invited to show up as a whole person, not just in their respective professional role or identity. This culture of honesty and integrity fosters responsibility and commitment.

→ *Inspiration for politics*: facilitate cooperation beyond formal (party) affiliations; create safe spaces to allow for more integrity, shadow work and being comfortable with not-knowing.

- **Listening to Evolutionary Purpose**: all TEAL organizations are built around a deeper purpose, serving whom defines their structures, daily work processes and organizational culture. Self-preservation is no aim in itself. The organization changes (and may even dissolve) as the purpose evolves.

→ *Inspiration for politics*: replace competition for power and zero-sum logics with cooperation in service of a larger (global) common purpose: to provide and preserve life and sustainable living conditions on planet Earth

\* **Ideas for a TEAL society**:

- politics serving the above deeper purpose would engage in a radical de-growth agenda and support the necessary shift of consciousness for re-purposing our lives, up until spiritually “re-enchanting the materialistic world of modernity”

- Small units that people take ownership for are excellent drivers of change, also beyond themselves.

- Democracy is an evolving entity and a living organism that can and should be further developed into TEAL directions.

## *The TEAL paradigm of organizing*

*Trust the collective intelligence of the system! (Laloux, 2014: 85)*

As indicated above, Laloux clearly frames his work in an evolutionary, developmental perspective. In other words, he sees the new, emerging ways of organizing cooperation as expressions of the new TEAL culture as described by Ken Wilber and Clare Graves. He observed them in many different contexts during his fieldwork, independent of one another.

Laloux illustrates this claim by identifying **three core principles** that he found to be indicative of a new, integral consciousness. This means that together, they can be understood as a totally new operating system that transcends and includes, i.e. goes beyond the structures, institutions, mindsets and practices we are all used to in our current experience of politics. At the same time, they have implications in all four quadrants of organizational life.

We will now go through these core principles one after the other and discuss to what degree they can also be cornerstones of a new, TEAL politics.

### *1. The principle of self-management*

*Trust breeds responsibility in return. When people work in small teams of trusted colleagues, extraordinary things begin to happen. There is no safety in separation. (Laloux, 2014: 81)*

The first element of the TEAL mode of organizing discussed by Laloux is the principle of self-organization or self-management. It has a structural and a process dimension.

In a nutshell, it comes down to leaving decision-making at the lowest possible level, ideally with those people who are dealing with the given issues on a daily basis, and who are most involved with and affected by them in their everyday work. In a company or organization, this is the level of teams. Therefore, unlike in hierarchical organizations, TEAL organizations are always organized around specific needs or well-defined tasks within the larger context of the organization as a whole.

In structural regard, Laloux mentions a number of **implications and advantages of this “operating system”** based on his observations in pioneering organizations. First, designing decision-making around concrete arising needs of concrete entities leaves it with those people who are most competent and most concerned. This not only increases the quality of decisions, it also reduces administrative apparatuses and related overhead to a necessary minimum.

Second, in relatively small groups who tend to meet on a regular basis, it is easier to establish a pragmatic mode of cooperation. People who know and can meet each other in person whenever necessary have an easier time building up trust-based relationships. In the course of this, they will naturally discover each other’s core competences and weaknesses and start to delegate tasks and/or decisions to whoever is most competent a given area, where needed. Besides enforcing spaces of trust, this flexible role-taking also provides experiential learning opportunities for everyone involved. In the best of cases, the team will get used to tapping into its joint collective intelligence.



Third, ensuring low-level decision-making creates a **culture of responsibility**, empowerment and engagement in these organizations. For if teams don't solve their own problems, no-one else will do it for them.

In similar contexts, fourth, the focus will more inevitably shift from problems to solutions.

As to the **process qualities** going with the principle of self-management and the embedding culture that is a prerequisite for it to work (Lower Left Quadrant), Laloux also found a number of typical features in all the pioneering organizations featured in the book.

One very common such quality is the **advice process**. It holds that before taking a decision, those who are in charge of decision-making must follow an agreed-upon process for seeking advice from at least one or two competent others before taking their decision. Conversely, team members must commit to take responsibility and ownership of their joint endeavors and actually speak up if something goes badly, in order for the decision-maker or the team as a whole to tackle the problem. They cannot simply complain and wait for someone else to sort out or solve things for them.

Given that the culture of bottom-up (self-)empowerment puts a lot more rights and responsibility onto individual team members, all pioneering organizations described by Laloux have put a particular focus on **support and scaffolding mechanisms**. These can take the form of formalized conflict resolution practices, professional facilitation, or coaching and supervision services on all levels. In this way, rather than spending funds on top-down control strategies, TEAL organizations invest in the personal development and capabilities of their members. These, in turn, benefit the whole organization and strengthen its cooperative culture.

### ***Inspirations for politics***

Considering that we understand democracy as a tool for self-governance, the principle of self-organization appears to be thrilling and attractive, also for the political realm. The widespread ideal of citizens' participation and stakeholder involvement also seems to make it immediately relevant. However, while it may sound self-evident at first sight, we have to be mindful of a few **structural differences between running an organization and designing self-organization into democratic politics**.

The main challenge in this regard is **representation**. For the time being, people are usually members of political entities, such as states, cities or communities, because of birth or due to their socialization, rather than, for the most part, by their own free choice. This implies that imposing common rules onto the members of any political entity requires a higher degree of legitimacy and consent than in an organization that people have voluntarily joined.

However, a number of **ideas and general inspirations** can be harvested from TEAL's principle of self-management. Here is a tentative list:

- let decisions be taken at the lowest possible level, i.e. closest to the people & stakeholders, while leaving ownership for decision with the decision-makers
- give people **maximum say** in issues they are affected by and have a stake or expertise in, through citizens involvement formats such as citizens assemblies, regular townhall meetings etc.

- provide them with the **means** that are necessary to take informed, sustainable decisions (data/information, stakeholder perspectives, budget, etc.)
- provide them with the **support** that helps to live a culture of distributed leadership (professional facilitation, conflict resolution services etc.)
- Instead of inviting to vote for parties, which statistically exclude 98% of the electorate, consider introducing formats for **rotating roles among citizens** in order to strengthen random representation, as well as people's sense of ownership and responsibility.
- transcend the idea of formal equality (one person, one vote) with that of appropriate (not equal) voice, thereby moving towards a sense of **equally felt agency and power**.

## 2. The principle of wholeness

*"There is no performance without happiness" (Laloux, 2014: 109).*

The second core principle identified by Laloux in all his TEAL organizations is their **striving for wholeness** in the way people show up.

In our current paradigm, we have become used to playing different roles in different contexts, for example at work, when doing business, as politicians, citizens, parents or friends. For most people, their roles in their public life differ from – or sometimes even contradict – those in their private lives. Many have become used to behave quite differently in both realms, depending on what expectations they (think they) have to meet. This separation of roles – and even identities – not only leaves many people with a sense of disconnection and dissatisfaction. Asking them to come to work only with their professional identities, while leaving part of themselves at home prevents them from bringing their full selves and hence, their highest potential to the tasks in question. Inversely, expecting employees to deal with their private issues outside of the workplace prevents fellow workers from acknowledging a colleague's personal struggles and to offer help or assistance where needed – which, in turn, could be a powerful way to strengthen trust, cooperation and community.

TEAL organizations have transcended these limitations of the current *business as usual* paradigm and invite their members to show up and be present as whole persons throughout their time in and with the organization. They have developed **three strategies** for implementing the principle of wholeness in their daily work.

First of all, wholeness is a core and mostly explicitly declared element of their **organizational culture**. Laloux frames this as "allowing humanity into work". This includes the creation of warm, welcoming spaces where people feel trusted and safe enough to show up as who they are, without the fear of being evaluated or criticized. Many TEAL organizations also allow their members to bring dogs or children to work, as a practical step to ease any worries that the person might be holding.

This holistic culture is generally framed by a set of strong and transparent values derived from the organization's purpose, which make clear what kinds of behavior are unacceptable. It also includes a **culture of integrity and honesty** when it comes to facing realities both on the inside and outside of the organization. Furthermore, mutual commitments are usually made explicit.

This shift in culture towards peoples' shared humanity implies that – much as in a family – there are no more external status markers or titles for people to build their identity onto, besides their individual contributions to the shared goals and purpose (see section below).



Second, TEAL organizations make sure that their culture of wholeness is not just a declaration of intent posted on their walls, but a **living practice** that is present throughout their daily work, to be internalized by their members. For instance, they would insist that their values are subject of regular discussions and iterations among all of them. As a rule, each TEAL organization has developed a set of individual practices which help to sustain and grow its organizational culture. At the same time, they support its members to best contribute to that culture by being and bringing their best selves into their teams and the organization as a whole.

**Typical practices** to support a TEAL culture include:

- regular (daily or weekly) personal check-ins (i.e. telling something “good or new”)
- hosting days of thanking, art salons, storytelling sessions and other annual community building events
- regular reflecting and dialog rounds
- meeting practices that help to hear all voices and keep everyone’s egos in check
- using cymbals and quiet spaces for slowing down conversations, meditation and silence
- time and expertise for addressing and resolving conflicts among members and/or teams.

These and other practices help organizations to sustain and grow a TEAL culture by immersing their members in it. By offering sufficient space and time for any tensions to be addressed in an appreciative and constructive way, they also provide deep learning and transformation for all involved.

Third, Laloux found that TEAL organizations also actively **support and train their members** in many regards, both with respect to fostering the organizational culture and with growing their own personal and professional potential. Much of this happens through the TEAL culture and practices themselves. However, following the motto “any training is good” (ibid.: 178ff.), the pioneers portrayed by Laloux would also offer significant training, coaching, intervention and supervision for teams and individuals alike. Their conviction that thriving members are the best precondition for a thriving organization causes them to offer extensive support not only with regard to professional and relational skills or challenges at the workplace, but also with their members’ personal development, and even their dealing with personal issues.

All of these practices contribute to raising awareness, building safe and respectful environments and a culture of trust, openness, appreciation and curiosity. Together, these elements help people to “risk speaking the truth of (their) soul and to learn to navigate the conflicts that might ensue” (ibid.: 143ff.). This, in turn, is a precondition for engaging in a healthy degree of what Ken Wilber calls *shadow work*, deepening the integrity of both the organization as a whole and its members. As a result, by firmly anchoring continued individual and collective self-reflection and the unlearning of previous habits into the organization’s operating system, the TEAL paradigm is clearly creating the conditions for **learning organizations**. And, as a side effect, engaging the “minds, hands, hearts and souls” of their members alike creates a level of happiness in them that apparently also increases their joint performance (ibid.: 94).

### ***Inspirations for politics***

*“If we can be in the world in the fullness of our humanity, what are we capable of?” (Laloux, 2014: 305)*

So how can the principle of wholeness be applied in politics? First of all, it is a good indicator of what *politics as usual* is *not* doing. Instead of inviting people into politics as whole persons, current politics usually forces them to hold a rather narrow and sometimes ill-defined role, which often creates tensions with other roles and identities. For instance, politicians are expected to behave in alignment with their overall party ideology and at the same time follow their consciousness or, if they hold offices, to speak from their roles.

Table 1 below shows a few examples of how a culture of wholeness appears to be the exact opposite of our current politics. The right column is an invitation to explore potential avenues and acupuncture points for change in the current system.

*Table 1: How to apply the principle of wholeness to politics*

<b>Principle of wholeness</b>	<b>Current politics</b>	<b>Acupuncture points for change</b>
Invite people to show up as whole persons	Politicians tied up in multiple roles: as - party members, - office holders, - representatives of a constituency - people	Political system: organize political representation beyond parties
Culture of trust and cooperation	Culture of distrust/control and competition	enhance cooperation instead of competition
Invite head, heart, hands and soul	Head is valued higher than heart. Showing emotions is considered a weakness	Foster formats that invite more wholeness and wisdom into politics
Culture of openness and learning	Politicians are expected to be experts and have a clear-cut position on virtually any topic	Appreciate not-knowing as a means to achieve deeper insight and higher wisdom
Making mistakes is welcomed and even invited in order to learn	Media and political competitors constantly search for weaknesses and mistakes (of their opponents) to take advantage of	Invite shadow work instead of blame games
Invitation to speak the truth of our soul	Saying what people supposedly want to hear	Create safe spaces allowing more integrity
Roles are taken based on competency and trust	Roles provide power over...	Explore and acknowledge everyone's individual competences
Openness and holding not-knowing as a value and capability	Not-knowing as a weakness, invites narrow-minded “experts”, self-promoters and short-sightedness	Facilitate perspective integration based on an <i>aperspectival</i> approach

### 3. The principle of listening to the evolutionary purpose

The third principle governing TEAL organizations must actually be considered as the first one when it comes to transforming politics. This principle is about listening to the deeper WHY. Laloux observes that TEAL organizations are **built around a generative purpose**. Hence, their purpose brings them into being in the first place. Thus, different from modern or more traditional organizations which aim to preserve themselves, a TEAL organization is not an end in itself. Seeing itself in service of a deeper WHY or larger emerging purpose implies that this purpose might well be beyond the given organization itself. Moreover, “it can’t limit its concern to the boundaries of the organization (if it) takes its purpose seriously” (Laloux, 2014: 216). Rather, Laloux describes the TEAL attitude as “being a partner of the world creating itself” (ibid.: 220f.).

From this follows that an organization’s purpose can change over time. This shows that the TEAL paradigm is **deeply evolutionary**. When focusing on the emerging future that wants to happen, it subscribes to the idea of a movement towards more wholeness, as it has already been described by Aurobindo (see chapter 1).

Obviously, this is a fundamental shift in the overall attitude of being in the world. While the currently still dominant modern paradigm (Gebser’s mental, Graves’ ER) is about designing the world according to man’s own plans and ideas, the TEAL (integral) approach primarily sets a clear intention, based on its overall purpose, makes space for listening to all emerging (gross-to-subtle) cues with all senses, and then rather effortlessly goes with the flow of responding to what it senses to be needed in the given context, field or situation. It trusts that if it is not pursuing egoistic goals, it will be guided to the necessary next steps. This is a much lighter, yet culturally still counter-intuitive approach, building on energetic resonance and trust, rather than written rules.

*“Keeping it oral keeps it alive” (ibid.: 201).*

The essence of this third principle, the attitude of listening to what wants to emerge, is very similar to Scharmer’s *presencing* mode. It also connects very well with what Hanzi Freinacht (see chapter 7 below) later framed as the vision of a “listening society” (Freinacht, 2017). For when it comes to organizations and, all the more so, to politics and society, this generative listening mode is ultimately a **collective practice**. It requires the joint effort of a group, where everyone is considered to be an equally important sensor. Since different people usually have very different listening and sensing skills, it is their **joint listening** that helps to access the full potential of **collective intelligence**.

This shift in focus brought about by TEAL consciousness and identity has important implications. One crucial consequence is that where everyone is focusing on a joint challenge, the idea of **competition is no longer important**. Laloux’ TEAL organizations happily share their ideas with others, including their competitors in the respective industry, inviting them to imitate whatever has proven successful. From their logic, sharing knowledge about how to achieve a worthwhile greater purpose and inviting others to join forces will only accelerate and support their own efforts to achieve this purpose.

A second implication is that, when the purpose is fulfilled, the organization might either transform with its purpose or simply dissolve. Structures are no aims in and of themselves in this paradigm, but rather follow purpose and function.

Therefore, third, in a more practical sense, the attitude and practice of responding to an evolutionary purpose brings forward much more **fluid structures and practices** than the linear, top-down and often hierarchical approaches we are used to from more traditional organizations. TEAL organizations have therefore come up with habits and practices similar to those we have learnt from Scharmer in chapter 5, that scaffold and invite

- moments of **silence**, allowing to better listen to cues about what their deeper purpose asks for
- an exploration, harvesting and integration of as many different relevant **perspectives** on this as possible,
- learning and (self-)improving by giving and receiving **feedback** from peers and fellow team members,
- putting ideas into **practical action** as soon possible (fail fast), in order to find out what works and what doesn't,
- encourage its members to act and **make mistakes**, as a means to receive more feedback from reality which then helps to improve and fine-tune prototypes.

So how can the paradigm of listening to the emerging purpose be translated into the realm of politics?

### *Inspirations for politics*

As mentioned above, Laloux' third principle appears as the most fundamental one when it comes to reinventing politics based on a TEAL/integral consciousness. Asking about the deeper WHY is a simple practice, however rarely used in a serious way. If politics got used to listening to the deeper WHY before turning towards more specific questions and challenges, its quest for answers could become much more focused and efficient. Albeit, this would mean to slow down and to **consciously counteract** a number of **well-established habits and practices** such as

- defining political strategies based on party programs
- drafting action plans and setting targets
- defining political identities against that of one's competitors, i.e. strengthening the feeling of disconnection within society
- engaging in zero-sum games (I win – you lose)
- seeking short-term success by trying to please a certain electorate,

...to name only a few.

Instead, in order to respond to the emerging purpose, politics would seek to **establish new formats, standards and practices** helping to

- identify and hold the focus on the respective political entity's deeper purpose
- invite everyone to act as a sensor and feed their perspective into the political process
- perceive and actively address shadow issues and blind spots connected to more limited ego-centric perspectives
- establish a political culture of cooperation and inclusion
- facilitate processes of tapping into collective intelligence
- strengthen intuitive and other transrational approaches to decision-making in addition to the rational dimension

- actively use appropriate states and field qualities for deepening deliberation and decision-making processes
- create indicators of success that are defined by the overall purpose (i.e. cosmo-local wellbeing) and by “doing the right thing”, such as the [“Good Country Index”](#)
- support a political culture of failing fast and learning from mistakes
- encourage citizens to develop and follow their own individual purpose and make contributions to the larger common good on this basis.

Besides these conclusions that we can draw from Laloux’ three core principles of the TEAL paradigm for the area of politics, he has also formulated some thoughts and ideas of his own about the wider social and political implications of TEAL consciousness.

### *Laloux’ vision of TEAL society*

*“The best way to predict the future is to create it” (Peter Drucker, quoted after Laloux, 2014: 293).*

In the end of his book, Frederic Laloux dedicates a chapter to what could follow from the emerging TEAL consciousness for society as a whole as it gains more support and momentum. Assuming that TEAL is indeed a qualitatively new structure or level of consciousness whose time has come and which, therefore, is bound to gain more influence sooner or later, he sketches out a few trends, based on his observations of what is already happening in pioneering organizations.

As an illustration of this evolutionary perspective, Laloux compares the scope of TEAL consciousness to the emergence and introduction of automobiles in 1900 which, as a key innovation at the time, soon came to totally **change “the basic infrastructure of society** (asphalt roads, highways, gas stations, suburbs, and malls)” (Laloux, 2014: 294). Similarly, considering the basic elements of TEAL consciousness, he paints a speculative vision of “what an Evolutionary-Teal society might look like” (ibid.). His vision not only offers rich *food for thought* for integral politics; it also connects well with what many of the pioneers studied by the LiFT Politics project are suggesting. Here are some inspirations:

- Viewed from an integral/TEAL perspective, the **purpose of all politics** is to provide optimal life and living conditions on planet Earth, not just for all of humanity, but also for our fellow species, including the planetary ecosystem as a whole.
- Based on this purpose, TEAL politics starts by acknowledging the limitations of this planet and the fact that it “cannot host unlimited growth”. This, in turn, implies that most of us, members of humanity, need to **radically change our lifestyle and consumption habits**. For Laloux, the goal would be the “ideal of a closed-loop economy with zero waste, zero toxicity, and 100 percent recycling” (ibid.: 295).
- Consequently, we must get rid of the ideal of material growth and instead acknowledge that besides basic material needs, humans also have **emotional, mental and spiritual needs**. However, the latter are generally receiving much less political attention and support. As a result, many of us have become used to compensating these immaterial needs through material consumption.

Pioneers such as [Integral Politics Switzerland](#) and the movements [Building a New Culture](#) and the [Inner Development Goals](#) are therefore promoting a political agenda that would replace the goal of fostering economic growth with that of fostering inner, personal and social growth instead (see <https://bewegung-neue-kultur.ch/public/document/download/63256>).

<https://integrale-politik.ch/grundlagen/> and <https://www.innerdevelopmentgoals.org/frame-work>).

- Looking at the challenge of a **de-/growth agenda** from a TEAL perspective, we easily come to see that it touches the core of our current socio-economic systems. Many of the items our growth economies currently produce do not respond to actual needs or demands of its consumers, but are either discarded right away or merely responding to artificially created needs. In contrast, virtually all economic players experience an inherent pressure to expand and grow in order to survive in the market. Their depending on continuous and/or increasing consumption has them actually create artificial needs in consumers through marketing and advertising that the latter would not have without these industries telling them so by appealing to fears or ego needs. Unfortunately, these incentives and mechanisms are deeply built into our economies.
- Therefore, while a TEAL society would likely naturally lose interest in similar products altogether, a TEAL political agenda paving the way towards such a society needs to fundamentally **rethink advertising**. If we evaluate all economic activity against the purpose of preserving good and healthy living conditions on planet Earth, Laloux holds that “advertising and malls might well be among the casualties” (Laloux, 2014: 295).
- At the same time, a TEAL worldview will naturally birth new, and rebirth existing industries in the light of the given purpose (such as organic agriculture and holistic health), as well as new ways of working, allowing more people to follow their purpose and calling at work. A shift from private to shared ownership or stewardship would likely go along with this.
- Next, our **education systems** would be redesigned to match the integral anthropology of personal growth and unfolding. Developing inner qualities in people – or creating favorable conditions for them to do so in order to meet their emotional, mental and spiritual needs would be given much greater attention than merely fulfilling their material needs. With basic material needs met, dedicating more time to creativity and play, as well as to our own personal and spiritual development and the health of our relationships and communities (ibid.: 303) would help to gradually replace the widespread fear of scarcity by trust in abundance as a new way of being in the world.
- As a result, according to Laloux, TEAL consciousness could help to **spiritually “re-enchant the materialistic world of modernity”** through its experience-based, “non-religious spirituality”, and eventually contribute to “heal previous religious divisions” (ibid.: 299). Also, its “yearning for deep and meaningful relationships”, along with its focus on addressing, if not healing the three disconnects described by Scharmer will likely re-energize our communities on all levels.

Note that Laloux’ vision of a TEAL society is primarily viewed through the lens of business and organizations, where he observes that TEAL consciousness – even though for the time being, it is still a small, yet active minority – is about to fundamentally transform deeply rooted habitual structures of work and cooperation. As mentioned above, it is difficult to simply transfer Laloux’ principles to the domain of politics, because political entities follow different logics of communitization than organizations. However, what we can learn from his book is that **small units that people take ownership for are excellent drivers of change, also beyond themselves**. This is because they offer experiential spaces for trying out and experimenting with new practices on a daily basis. Similar lived and embodied experiences can ultimately anchor a new culture in people’s heads, hearts and hands. In turn, this will ideally have them call for new, corresponding structures and institutions on societal level, too – or even inspire them to simply develop these on their own.



My guess is that very likely, learning *TEAL for democracy* can best happen through engaging people in smaller contexts such as organizations or regular community gatherings, which give them a **sense of ownership for their community affairs**. This is where TEAL approaches and practices such as socio-cocratic self-organization and decision-making can best be learnt. Very likely, coming together in local communities where, as Laloux puts it, “purpose clearly comes before consideration of power and governance” (Laloux, 2014: 302), is one of the most energizing ways to experience the co-creation of radically more productive solutions and thus, a more soulful and purposeful politics. Through them, ultimately an entire society can be transformed. In this sense, form follows purpose.

However, given that this purpose-oriented **TEAL culture** directly contradicts fundamental principles of our current ways of doing things, Laloux makes clear that in the case of organizations, it **needs to be embraced by** the respective organization’s **leadership** – or its owners, if the two are not the same, for it to be able to take root in a sustainable way. So paradoxically, while a TEAL culture of self-management can be introduced in a top-down process, this is hardly possible the other way round in most organizations. What does this imply for politics and democratic society? Does it mean that those who are currently in power must – or are even the only ones who can introduce TEAL principles? Certainly not – quite on the contrary.

In a democracy, the people are the sovereign who only delegates power to political representatives for a limited period of time. Hence, according to Laloux’ own logic, introducing TEAL in politics must occur somewhat differently than in the world of organizations: It has to be gradually learnt and implemented starting from the bottom, and then scaling it up to higher levels of representation and decision-making.

Successful examples of this can be visited in the [neighborocracy movement](#), which has started in India, the world’s largest democracy. In rural areas, neighborhood parliaments were set up, which use *Sociocracy*, one of the TEAL approaches mentioned by Laloux, as their operating system. By now, the movement counts about 400.000 such parliaments in India, plus about 100.000 Children’s parliaments. All of these take immediate care of their community affairs where public politics often got stuck in bureaucratic processes.<sup>2</sup> As a positive side-effect, those parliaments have managed to do what democratic structures were often unable to accomplish: re-enchanting peoples’ sense of connectedness with their communities, their sense of having a say and of truly mattering, their enthusiasm for taking ownership for their concerns, in short: pouring new energy into the system. In this way, as a TEAL form of governance, neighborocracy is about to re-energize and transform democracy in India and beyond, thereby taking it to a new level.

Interestingly, while Laloux is very brief about **democracy** proper, he does stress its evolutionary nature, recalling that as a governance system, democracy only “emerged with the Orange/Green worldview (ER/FS in Graves, see chapter 3; Laloux, 2014: 298). In other words, democracy is itself a quite recent product of human cultural evolution. More precisely, we can see in hindsight that since its first emergence in the Greek republics, it has gone through considerable transformations. On the one hand, the ancient Greek system of sortition-based representation was eventually replaced by elected representation. On the other hand, the process of electing representatives essentially became more and more inclusive, from allowing only wealthy men to vote, to including all adult citizens, to granting particular minority rights to certain groups (also known as *affirmative action*).

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<sup>2</sup> For more information see the SONEC (SOciocratic NEighborhood Circles) project’s website: <https://sonec.org>.

As a side note, of course, the concept of democracy has also seen cases of misuse, misdevelopment or degeneration. For instance, numerous autocrats and even dictators have chosen to frame their rule as “democratic”. This shows the growing popularity and attractiveness of the concept itself as a source of legitimacy – as well as its quality as an “empty signifier” (Laclau & Mouffe, 2014; Torfing, 1999) that tends to be filled with very different meanings in different contexts.

Both of these developments show that democracy is not a rigid concept, but a rather flexible framework that can very well (be) adapt(ed) to changing circumstances and demands – provided that we keep in mind – and keep our focus on listening to its purpose or, as a group of innovators around the German NGO Mehr Demokratie’s project “[Deepening Democracy](#)” frame it, to the **essence of democracy** ([see our POP video here](#)).

So the question arises, whether democracy as we know it is or could still be the right form and format for TEAL governance. Could democracy be further transformed to a degree that would allow to turn it into an adequate structural match for implementing TEAL principles? Or, put differently, if our current understanding and use of democracy is outdated, what could be an alternative that serves the essence of democracy even better?

Laloux seems to assume that Yes, it can be transformed. He argues that for democracy to be taken to a TEAL level would probably mean to “deepen democracy with more citizen involvement” and with grounding “human decision-making in the basic evolutionary unfolding of the world. Rather than projecting what people want onto the world (the basic premise of democracy), we might look for ways to listen to what the world is calling for” (Laloux, 2014: 298). In other words, Laloux suggests a **transformation of democracy both in depth and in scope**. This is exactly what neighborhood parliaments do.

In fact, it also aligns well with what we have found in our stakeholder interviews: a desire to both **broaden citizen participation and to deepen democracy** through new qualities of listening. This means that, from a TEAL perspective, transforming democracy requires structural and cultural innovations alike. As a matter of fact, both are not only closely intertwined, but depend on each other. Drawing on both Laloux and the experience of the neighborhood parliaments, a TEAL culture brings forward practices of serving and following meaning and purpose. In the appendix of his book, Laloux provides us with a rich inventory of such **practices** that can be adopted in suitable contexts in daily life (ibid.: 329). These will ultimately enhance more flexible structures that allow to fluidly navigate big challenges in changing constellations, according to the needs of the moment (ibid.: 303).

For the time being, the majority of our political institutions are old-timers, dating back to modern consciousness. Drafted according to the metaphor of machines, they are functional with regard to accomplishing linear tasks, but too inflexible and formalized for delegating responsibilities based on competence and capabilities. As Laloux has made clear, the **guiding metaphor of TEAL is a living organism**, which aims to work with “life’s natural tendency to (self-)organize, seeking inspiration from life and nature” and “sail with the wind of evolution at their back” (ibid.: 292).

However, initiatives like the [Creative Bureaucracy Festival](#) (see my [POP interview with Sabine Junginger and Caroline Paulick-Thiel](#)) are starting to insert TEAL ideas and practices into these institutions now. Note that bureaucracies are in some sense similar to large organizations and hence can act as conveyor belts for change when it comes to the public realm. As to the realm of (party) politics proper, the TEAL longing for a more soulful culture has been discussed in more detail by Hanno Burmester and Clemens Holtmann in their [book on transformative parties](#) (Burmester & Holtmann, 2021).

At the same time, politics can of course support TEAL ways of organizing and doing things by creating favorable legal and fiscal conditions for them to thrive. So while we know that individual and cultural development can take considerable time to unfold, many individual and collective initiatives can also add up to a cultural change that might ultimately bring about a TEAL society. Therefore, while existing “systems often hold longer than we think, (...) they (might also) end up by collapsing much faster than we imagine (Kenneth Rogoff, quoted after Laloux, 2014: 300).

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