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DECISION-MAKING PRINCIPLES IN THE MANAGEMENT OF TEAL ORGANIZATIONS

Zasady podejmowania decyzji w zarządzaniu organizacjami turkusowymi

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Abstract: Teal organizations are a progressive organizational model based on self-management, employee autonomy and decentralized authority. These organizations operate without traditional hierarchies, based on a self-managed structure and the empowering of individuals and teams to take responsibility for decisions through consultations and collective intelligence. The objective of the research was to develop a set of universal decision-making principles in the management of teal organizations. The research methods applied in the study include a systematic review of the literature, along with its critical analysis, observation and logical deduction. To achieve the objective of the research, a conceptual organizational structure diagram of the teal team, a conceptual organizational structure diagram of the teal organization and a set of 11 universal decision-making principles in the management of teal organizations were developed. The research results can be used by managers to improve decision-making process in their organizations, especially in the frames of remote and decentralized work, employee engagement, and the support of self-management and transparency. A promising direction of future research are digital tools and the integration of AI in the decision-making process.

Keywords: teal organization, decision-making, self-management, organizational resilience, collective intelligence

Streszczenie: Organizacje turkusowe to progresywny model organizacyjny oparty na samorządności, autonomii pracowników i decentralizacji przywództwa. Organizacje te działają bez tradycyjnej struktury hierarchicznej, opierają się na samozarządzaniu, dają jednostkom i zespołom możliwość podejmowania decyzji poprzez konsultacje i inteligencję zbiorową. Celem badania było opracowanie zestawu uniwersalnych zasad podejmowania decyzji w zarządzaniu organizacjami turkusowymi. Zastosowano metody badawcze takie jak: systematyczny przegląd literatury wraz z jej krytyczną analizą, obserwacją i logicznym wnioskowaniem. Aby osiągnąć cel badania, opracowano ideowy schemat struktury organizacyjnej zespołu turkusowego, ideowy schemat struktury organizacyjnej organizacji turkusowej oraz zestaw 11 uniwersalnych zasad podejmowania decyzji w zarządzaniu organizacjami turkusowymi. Wyniki badań mogą być wykorzystane przez menedżerów do usprawnienia procesu decyzyjnego w ich organizacjach, szczególnie w przypadku pracy zdalnej i zdecentralizowanej, zaangażowania pracowników w zarządzanie organizacją, wspierania samorządności i transparentności. Obiecującym kierunkiem przyszłych badań są narzędzia cyfrowe i integracja sztucznej inteligencji w procesie decyzyjnym.

Słowa kluczowe: organizacja turkusowa, podejmowanie decyzji, samozarządzanie, odporność organizacyjna, inteligencja zbiorowa

Introduction

The importance of the topic results from the growing popularity of teal organizations and their impact on contemporary management (Ładysz, 2023). In recent years, traditional hierarchical organizational structures have come under increasing scrutiny, particularly as they struggle to adapt to the fast-paced, complex, and often unpredictable nature of the modern business environment (Hamel, 2007; Lee & Edmondson, 2017).

Organizations today face a host of challenges that require not only operational agility but also a fundamentally different approach to management and decision-making. In response to these pressures, “teal organizations” have emerged as a novel organizational paradigm, emphasizing decentralized authority, self-management, and purpose-driven work (Laloux, 2014). This model, first articulated by Frederic Laloux in his seminal work “Reinventing Organizations” (2014), proposes that traditional decision-making hierarchies be replaced with a network of self-organized teams capable of rapid, context-sensitive decision-making (Robertson, 2015; Gidley, 2017).

Teal organizations represent the latest stage in the evolution of organizational structures, building on theoretical frameworks like integral theory (Wilber, 2000) and self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000). These organizations are characterized by three core principles: self-management, wholeness, and an evolutionary purpose, each of which directly influences how decisions are made and enacted within the organization (Laloux, 2014; Hamel & Zanini, 2018). Unlike traditional organizations, where decision-making authority is concentrated at the top, teal organizations empower employees at all levels to participate in the decision-making process, relying on trust and autonomy rather than control and hierarchy (Robertson, 2015). This shift is seen as essential for fostering innovation, resilience, and employee engagement in today’s knowledge-intensive industries (Edmondson, 1999; Snowden & Boone, 2007).

The decision-making processes within teal organizations are grounded in the concept of self-governance, which challenges conventional notions of authority and accountability. In contrast to hierarchical models, where decisions are filtered through layers of management, teal organizations rely on distributed decision-making, where individual teams have the autonomy to make decisions independently, provided they align with the organization’s overarching purpose (Lee & Edmondson, 2017; Hamel, 2007). This distributed approach aligns with complexity theory, which suggests that decentralized systems are better equipped to handle unpredictable and complex environments (Snowden & Boone, 2007). Moreover, studies in behavioral psychology and organizational theory highlight that individuals perform more effectively when they experience autonomy, competence, and relatedness, all of which are embedded in the self-management practices of teal organizations (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Gagné & Deci, 2005).

Despite the theoretical appeal of teal organizations, empirical research on their decision-making processes remains sparse. Most studies focus on case analyses of pioneering organizations such as Buurtzorg, Morning Star, and FAVI, which have adopted teal principles with varying degrees of success (Laloux, 2014; Hamel & Zanini, 2018). These cases suggest that teal decision-making can foster innovation and employee satisfaction; however, they also indicate challenges, such as potential ambiguity in decision roles, accountability issues, and difficulties in scaling the model (Robertson, 2015; Frederick & Weber, 2018). The complexity of distributed decision-making processes, combined with the necessity for alignment to the organization’s evolutionary purpose, makes decision-making within teal organizations an area ripe for further exploration (Lee & Edmondson, 2017). This paper provides a comprehensive analysis of decision-making within teal organizations, focusing on its specific features and aiming to develop a set of universal decision-making principles in the management of teal organizations.

Methods

Research methods applied in the study include a systematic review of the literature, along with its critical analysis, observation and logical deduction. A systematic review of the literature on the contemporary challenges in decision-making in organizations and on teal organizations was performed on books and open access articles obtained mainly from digital libraries. This method was complemented by a simple but well-established method of critical, attentive (and sometimes also participatory) observation which offers updated information about ongoing changes and trends in decision-making in teal organizations. This approach – despite its selective character – proves to be relatively efficient in developing: a/ the conceptual organizational structure diagram of the teal team, b/ the conceptual organizational structure diagram of the teal organization, c/ the set of universal decision-making principles in the management of teal organizations.

Decision-making process in teal organizations

Teal organizations represent a progressive model of organizational structure and management, characterized by self-management, wholeness, and an evolutionary purpose. This paradigm, introduced and popularized by Laloux (2014) in “Reinventing Organizations”, builds on previous stages of organizational development, integrating concepts from social psychology, organizational theory, and behavioral management.

Teal organizations are defined as workplaces that emphasize autonomy, purpose-driven work, and collaborative, non-hierarchical structures (Laloux, 2014). They operate without traditional hierarchies, aiming to empower employees through self-management and shared responsibility. This model encourages individuals to bring their “full self” to work and fosters a collective mission that aligns personal values with organizational goals (Laloux, 2014; Gidley, 2017). Teal organizations are part of a broader spectrum of organizational types, ranging from more traditional, hierarchical structures to agile, team-centered models (Frederick & Weber, 2018).

The teal organizational model is influenced by multiple theoretical frameworks:

- Integral theory. Laloux’s (2014) framework is grounded in Ken Wilber’s Integral Theory, which suggests that human consciousness evolves through stages, each characterized by different values and ways of interacting. Teal organizations correspond to a developmental stage focused on self-actualization, collaboration, and adaptability (Wilber, 2000; Laloux, 2014).
- Self-determination theory (SDT). Deci and Ryan’s (2000) SDT, which emphasizes autonomy, competence, and relatedness as drivers of motivation, aligns closely with the principles of self-management and personal wholeness in teal organizations (Deci & Ryan, 2000).
- Complexity theory and systems thinking. Teal organizations also draw on complexity theory and systems thinking, recognizing organizations as dynamic systems that can adapt and evolve (Snowden & Boone, 2007). This perspective promotes resilience and flexibility in the face of uncertainty.

Distinguishing features of teal organizations:

- Self-management. Teal organizations function with minimal hierarchical structure. Decision-making authority is decentralized, allowing employees to make decisions autonomously within teams (Robertson, 2015; Laloux, 2014). This fosters a sense of ownership, responsibility, and empowerment among team members (Lee & Edmondson, 2017).
- Wholeness. Emphasizing authenticity, teal organizations encourage employees to bring their full selves to work, blurring the lines between professional and personal identity (Hamel & Zanini, 2018). They implement practices that create a supportive environment, fostering psychological safety and emotional openness (Edmondson, 1999).
- Evolutionary Purpose. Unlike traditional organizations driven by profit maximization, teal organizations orient themselves around an evolving purpose. This purpose acts as a guiding principle, aligning individual and organizational objectives organically over time (Hodgson, 2019).

These distinctive features and principles highlight the unique operational ethos of teal organizations, where autonomy, transparency, and alignment with an evolutionary purpose underpin a non-hierarchical, adaptive structure. By focusing on wholeness, continuous learning, and servant leadership, teal organizations seek to create environments that support both individual and organizational growth in alignment with shared values and goals.

The teal organizational structure is flat and decentralized. The conceptual organizational structure diagram of the teal team consists of employees and a leader/coach/expert/facilitator/mentor (Figure 1). The conceptual organizational structure diagram of the teal organization consists of interconnected self-managing teams, reflecting the autonomy and collaborative nature of teal organizations (Figure 2).

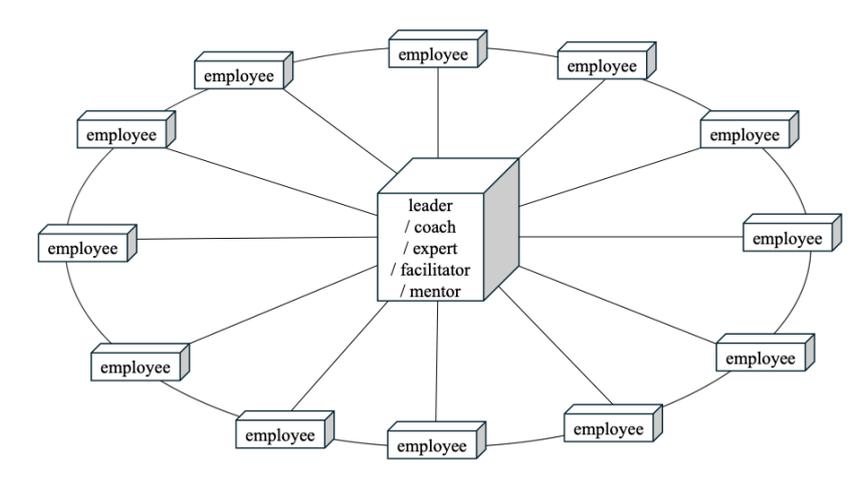


Fig. 1. Conceptual diagram of the organizational structure of a self-managing teal team

Source: own elaboration

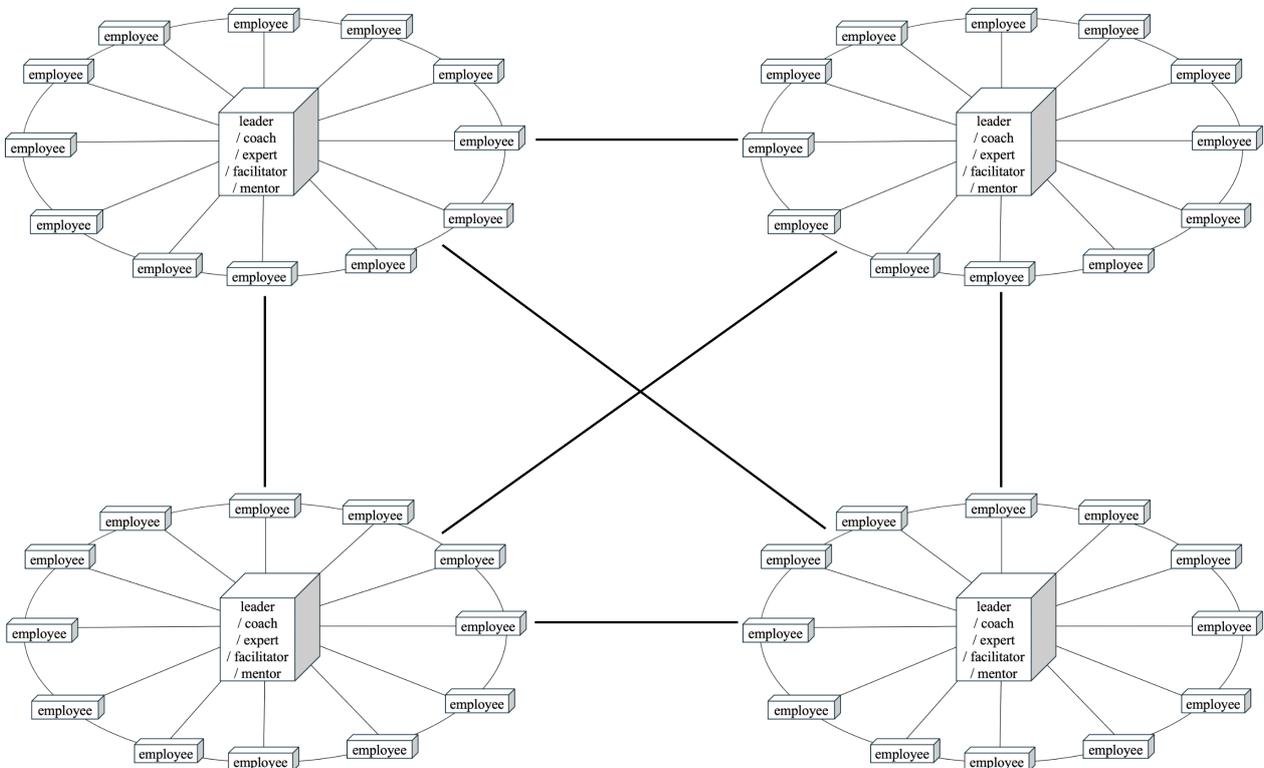


Fig. 2. Conceptual diagram of the organizational structure of teal organization

Source: own elaboration

Below is a theoretical model illustrating decision-making in the management of teal organizations. It visually represents the decentralized structure, with interconnected circles for self-managing teams, consultation processes, and communication flows (Figure 3).

Teal organizations are characterized by self-managing teams, which consist of workers fulfilling various roles, including both functional and managerial duties. Decisions within these organizations are made through a straightforward advice process or a conflict resolution process when necessary. There is no centralized control. The values of the organization are not merely mentioned; they are actively embodied in the behaviors of the employees. Everyone in the organization is attuned to its purpose and takes action accordingly while being responsive to environmental changes.

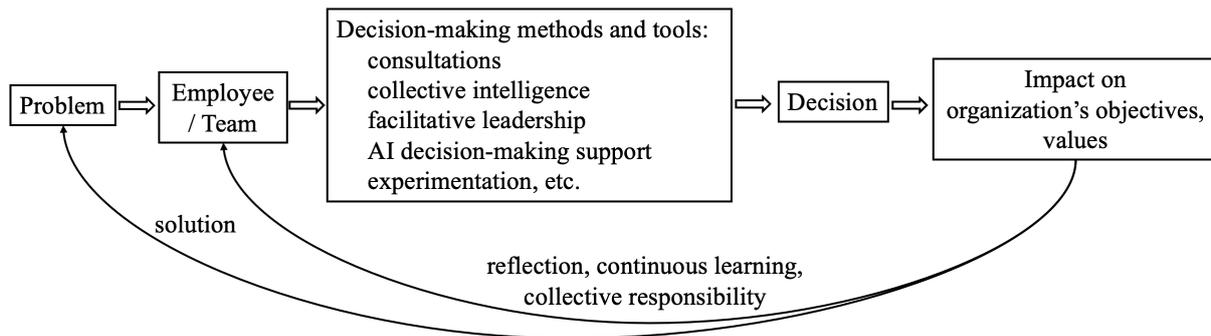


Fig. 3. Model of decision-making in teal organization

Source: own elaboration

Proposal of universal decision-making principles in the management of teal organizations

Teal organizations, characterized by self-management, decentralized authority, and a shared purpose, operate on a set of decision-making principles that prioritize autonomy, collective intelligence, and alignment with organizational values. The following principles outline the theoretical framework of decision-making within teal organizations, as derived from recent research on progressive organizational structures:

Decentralized decision-making autonomy. In teal organizations, decision-making authority is distributed across all levels, empowering individuals and teams to make decisions within their areas of expertise. Each employee or team has autonomy in making decisions about the areas for which they are responsible. Decisions are not limited by hierarchy, and responsibility for them lies with the person or group that directly concerns the topic. This principle promotes agility, reduces bureaucratic delays and enhances responsiveness to changing conditions, as individuals are not required to seek hierarchical approval, thus fostering autonomy and ownership. Laloux (2014) highlights that decentralized decision-making aligns with teal organizations' core value of self-management, allowing decisions to be made by those closest to the issue.

Minimally sufficient organizational structure. Teal organizations avoid complex procedures and decision-making structures, focusing on ensuring that organizational structure is only as developed as necessary. This means minimal formal rules and constraints so as not to slow down the decision-making process.

Consultative decision-making process. Teal organizations typically employ a consultative process, where individuals, before making significant decisions, are expected to seek advice and input from colleagues who might be affected by their decisions or who possess relevant expertise. If there is enough time, before finalizing a decision, individuals or teams are encouraged to consult with stakeholders who may be affected. This practice leverages collective intelligence and ensures that diverse perspectives are considered, minimizing potential risks and enhancing the quality of decisions (Robertson, 2015). The consultative process is integral to maintaining a balance between autonomy and accountability, as it involves those affected by or knowledgeable about the decision without imposing top-down control. The consultative approach leverages diverse perspectives, enriching the decision-making process through a balance of collective insight and individual responsibility. The idea is not to obtain consent but to seek opinions so as to arrive at a better understanding of the consequences. Although the ultimate responsibility for the decision rests with the person or team making the decision, the consultation process is designed to minimize risk and increase the quality of the decisions made.

Collective intelligence utilization. Teal organizations utilize collective intelligence, where decisions are taken based on the accumulated knowledge and experience of the organization. This principle supports innovation and problem-solving, as employees draw upon shared expertise and data-driven insights. Decisions are better when they draw on the knowledge and experience of more people. Therefore, it is crucial to actively encourage the participation of different team members in the decision-making process in order to maximize the use of the organization's collective intelligence.

Transparency of decisions and open access to information. Transparency is a foundational value in teal organizations, where decision-making processes and outcomes are openly accessible to all members. By promoting transparency, teal organizations ensure that information relevant to decisions is shared across teams, fostering trust, mutual understanding, and responsibility in the team. All decisions, both individual and team, should be transparent; and rationales behind decisions should be visible and open for review to all members of the organization. This principle also enables individuals to make informed decisions, as they have access to the data, context, and rationale underlying previous choices (Lee & Edmondson, 2017). Transparency, therefore, strengthens both accountability and informed autonomy within the decision-making framework.

Continuous learning and adaptive feedback loops. Teal organizations emphasize the importance of learning from decisions and incorporating feedback into future actions. Through regular retrospectives and feedback mechanisms, teams and individuals reflect on the outcomes of their decisions, identify areas for improvement, and adapt their practices accordingly (Lee & Edmondson, 2017). This principle supports organizational agility, resilience, and long-term sustainability, enabling teal organizations to evolve in response to new insights and changing circumstances, reinforcing a culture of continuous improvement.

Experimental approach. Teal organizations support a culture of experimentation. This means that new ideas are tested in practice, and decisions can be made in the form of small, controlled experiments that allow for quick adjustments to the strategy in the event of failure.

Trust instead of control. In teal organizations, there is no need for oversight of the decision-making process. Instead of control the process, it is based on trusting employees and teams to make the best possible decisions in the interests of the organization.

Facilitative leadership. In teal organizations, leaders act as facilitators rather than authoritative decision-makers. Their role is to support employees by providing resources, guidance, and removing obstacles to effective decision-making. This facilitative approach encourages a more inclusive and empowered workforce, allowing employees to take ownership of their choices while benefiting from leader mentorship and support. Robertson (2015) argues that facilitative leadership in teal organizations enhances engagement and accountability, as employees feel supported yet free to make decisions aligned with organizational values. Leaders in teal organizations act as facilitators, guiding teams, providing resources, and removing obstacles rather than dictating actions. This servant-leadership model aligns with the self-managing structure, supporting employees in taking ownership of their work (Raelin, 2016). According to Laloux (2014), leaders in teal organizations are encouraged to cultivate an environment that supports autonomy and collective decision-making, positioning them as mentors and enablers rather than authoritative figures.

Individual and collective responsibility. Responsibility for decision outcomes in teal organizations is both individual and collective. While individual decision-makers or teams are directly accountable for the results of their decisions, the organization as a whole supports a culture of shared responsibility. Responsibility for decisions is shared, with each decision-maker or team accountable for their choices. Each team member or self-managing team is accountable for the results of their decisions in their respective domains. This dual-layered approach to responsibility encourages employees to be proactive in their decision-making processes and promotes shared ownership over organizational outcomes. This means responsibility not only for the result but also for the transparency of the decision-making process and the involvement of the appropriate parties. This principle:

- fosters a collaborative environment where individuals feel empowered yet remain accountable for their actions,
- encourages ownership at all levels and aligns decision-making with the organization's purpose and values, reinforcing commitment and ethical behavior.

As Laloux (2014) notes:

- individuals in teal organizations are empowered to make decisions within their roles, yet this autonomy is balanced by a collective commitment to the organization's purpose, aligning personal responsibility with broader organizational objectives,

- shared responsibility ensures that the repercussions of decisions are managed collectively, reducing blame and promoting a learning-focused organizational culture.

Alignment with organizational purpose and values. Every decision in a teal organization is made with reference to the organization's core purpose and values. Decision-making is not solely outcome-oriented; it is also guided by the question of whether the decision aligns with the organization's mission. This purpose-driven approach ensures coherence in organizational actions, as all decisions contribute to the long-term vision, evolutionary goal, and values of the organization (Laloux, 2014; Robertson, 2015). Employees should be aware of the company's mission and values. Purpose-driven decision-making allows them to make decisions in line with the company's strategic assumptions.

These decision-making principles underscore the distinct approach of teal organizations, which prioritizes autonomy, trust, alignment with the organization's evolutionary purpose and allows to create a flexible, dynamic decision-making environment that allows employees of a teal organization to be fully engaged in the processes, strengthen their responsibility and effectiveness. By decentralizing decision-making and fostering a transparent, consultative environment, teal organizations aim to create a culture of empowerment, trust, and continuous growth.

Discussion

This study explores decision-making processes within teal organizations, a management model characterized by self-management, decentralized authority, and an evolutionary purpose (Laloux, 2014). The findings contribute to the growing literature on teal organizations by clarifying the mechanisms and challenges involved in decision-making in these groups, which differ significantly from traditional hierarchical models (Bernstein et al., 2016; Lee & Edmondson, 2017).

One notable feature of teal organizations is the decentralization of decision-making authority. Employees are granted autonomy and are responsible for decisions typically reserved for management in conventional organizations (Foss & Klein, 2012). This decentralized structure aligns with theories of self-determination and intrinsic motivation, suggesting that autonomy enhances engagement and satisfaction (Ryan & Deci, 2000). For example, Kohn (2015) finds that in environments where individuals have decision-making power, productivity and innovation increase due to greater personal investment and accountability. However, granting autonomy in decision-making also introduces complexities. Recent studies indicate that although distributed authority empowers employees, it can lead to ambiguities around accountability, resulting in potential coordination challenges (Lee & Edmondson, 2017; Martela, 2019). In teal organizations, decision-making often involves consultation processes rather than traditional approvals, necessitating high levels of communication and trust. While this reliance on interpersonal trust and informal networks can be beneficial in agile contexts, it may also become a vulnerability during periods of organizational crisis or change, when rapid and unified action is required (Grant & Parker, 2009; Laloux, 2014).

Psychological safety, defined as the shared belief that the team is safe for interpersonal risk-taking, is crucial for effective decision-making in teal organizations (Edmondson, 1999). These organizations depend on individuals feeling secure enough to voice their perspectives, particularly when decisions require extensive input from multiple stakeholders. Edmondson and Lei (2014) found that psychological safety significantly predicts open communication and effective problem-solving in flat organizations. This aligns with teal organizations' emphasis on transparency and vulnerability, as studies suggest that psychological safety can mediate the relationship between decision-making decentralization and team performance (Frazier et al., 2017). However, psychological safety alone may not fully resolve decision-making challenges in teal structures. Wang and Hollenbeck (2019) argue that psychological safety is not a substitute for a clear, shared understanding of roles and responsibilities, which can be less defined in teal organizations. Therefore, while psychological safety fosters open dialogue, it may need to be complemented by structured communication protocols to navigate complex decision-making scenarios effectively.

The concept of collective intelligence – the shared ability of a group to achieve goals that exceed individual capacity – is particularly relevant to teal organizations, where decisions are often made collaboratively (Woolley et al., 2010). Collective intelligence can enhance decision-making quality through the diversity of thought, perspective-taking, and cooperative problem-solving (Malone & Bernstein, 2015). For teal organizations, fostering collective intelligence may require balancing group cohesion with cognitive diversity, an area of decision-making theory that remains under-researched in self-managed contexts (Hackman & Katz, 2010). However, relying solely on collective intelligence poses inherent risks. Research indicates the potential for groupthink and decision-making inefficiencies in environments that prioritize consensus over speed and effectiveness (Janis, 1982; Gigerenzer & Gaissmaier, 2011). In teal organizations, decision fatigue and prolonged consultation processes can hinder agility, especially when rapid responses are needed (Lee & Edmondson, 2017). Thus, balancing the advantages of collective intelligence with the need for decisive action presents a significant challenge.

Teal organizations are distinguished by an “evolutionary purpose,” which implies that the organization’s direction emerges organically rather than being defined top-down (Laloux, 2014). This aligns with complexity theory, where organizations adapt to emerging patterns in their environments (Snowden & Boone, 2007). A study by Reeves and Deimler (2011) found that organizations with adaptive strategic frameworks are more resilient in volatile environments, suggesting that teal organizations may possess a competitive advantage in terms of adaptability. Additionally, evolutionary purpose aligns well with participatory decision-making, as it encourages teams to continuously re-evaluate strategic goals based on new insights (Puranam et al., 2015). However, this organic approach to strategy can present challenges in aligning the organization’s purpose with individual decision-making initiatives. Studies indicate that without clear strategic anchors, decision-making may become fragmented, with team objectives occasionally diverging from broader organizational goals (Grant, 2013; Snow, Fjeldstad, & Langer, 2017). Consequently, teal organizations may benefit from periodic recalibration of collective objectives to ensure coherence in decision-making across decentralized units.

The issues discussed in the article require further scientific research, primarily empirical. Future research should explore the implications of teal decision-making in varied industry contexts, as different sectors may present unique challenges for decentralized structures (Birkinshaw, 2010). Case study analysis should be based on examples of companies operating according to the teal model. Future research should answer such questions as:

- What specific strategies can teal organizations implement to address accountability issues in decentralized decision-making?
- How do teal organizations measure the success of their decision-making processes compared to traditional hierarchical structures?

Such explorations should cover various aspects, such as building a culture of trust and self-organization, management 3.0 or leadership 3.0, management through values, and new management methods. For example, it is important to analyze how leaders appear in teal organizations and how they act as mentors, helping employees make decisions and coordinating team activities. Furthermore, longitudinal studies could provide insights into the sustainability of decision-making practices in teal organizations.

A relevant area for future research is digital tools for remote and decentralized work, supporting self-management and transparency. In terms of future paths, a promising direction is to integrate AI tools in the decision-making process in teal organizations, e.g., ChatGPT, as an intelligent and autonomous agent proposing different solutions based on information gathered in numerous databases worldwide. The agent should include a decision-making core to overcome the current limitations, such as a high level of uncertainty, high dynamics of external conditions, the evolutionary purpose of the teal organization, the increasing role of work-life balance, and different individual goals and competencies of employees.

Conclusions

This study has explored the decision-making processes within teal organizations, a progressive management model characterized by self-management, employee autonomy, and decentralized authority. Through a review of relevant literature, the article highlights the core principles that differentiate teal organizations from traditional hierarchical structures. The role of the consultation process is examined as a key mechanism for decision-making, along with the use of technological tools that facilitate decentralized decision processes in self-managing teams. The consultative approach ensures that multiple perspectives are considered, thereby minimizing risks and promoting a balanced distribution of responsibility. The new role of the leader: leadership as a supporting function, not a controlling function in the decision-making process. Leaders as mentors and facilitators.

In teal organizations, the responsibility for the consequences of decisions is a shared and decentralized concept closely aligned with the organization's foundational values of self-management, autonomy, and accountability. The guiding principles of responsibility in these organizations empower individuals and teams, encouraging a proactive approach to owning the outcomes of their actions, both positive and negative. Each employee who makes a decision is directly responsible for its consequences. When decisions are made at the team level, the entire team shares that responsibility. This self-managing structure fosters an environment where accountability is seamlessly integrated with autonomy and collective purpose, ensuring that individuals and teams feel both empowered and committed to the outcomes of their decisions.

Analyzing the specific features of teal organizations reveals several key benefits in decision-making, including increased organizational efficiency, enhanced adaptability, greater employee engagement, increased innovation, and faster decision-making. However, potential challenges also arise, such as accountability issues, the risk of disorder in the absence of clear procedures, the need for robust communication frameworks, the risk of inexperienced individuals making poor decisions, and difficulties in scaling the teal model.

In sum, while teal organizations offer an innovative approach to decision-making that aligns with contemporary demands for agility and adaptability, they also present unique operational challenges. Addressing these challenges will require ongoing refinement of decision-making frameworks that reconcile individual autonomy with collective organizational goals, thereby maximizing the potential of teal structures.

The main conclusion is that, despite being in the early stages of development, the concept of teal organizations has the potential to revolutionize decision-making processes.

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