

# Turquoise Companies. Future or utopia?

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## **Abstract:**

**Aim:** The paper presents the idea behind Turquoise Companies (Evolutionary-Teal Organizations) by giving their definition as a style of human relationships unfolding in a company. This style involves the removal of a fixed hierarchy while ensuring full engagement of workers in the development and activity of the company. Moreover, the question is raised whether Turquoise Companies will become a common model in the future, or whether we are dealing here with a utopian idea.

**Design/Research method:** Literature review and personal reflections.

**Conclusions/Findings:** The structure of management styles used in companies could be improved by increasing the proportion of turquoise firms.

**Originality/Value of the article:** The paper provides some thoughts on Turquoise Companies of the author, having more than 70 years scientific experience.

*Keywords:* company, turquoise, relationships, colour  
JEL: A120, Z190

## **1. Introduction**

In this paper, the idea behind Turquoise Companies (Evolutionary-Teal Organizations) is presented. Such a company is characterized by a style of human relationships unfolding in a company. This style involves the removal of a fixed hierarchy while ensuring full engagement of workers in the development and activity of the company. Moreover, the question is raised whether Turquoise Companies will become a common model in the future, or whether we are dealing here with a utopian idea.

## **2. Turquoise companies**

In May 2016, in a radio program broadcast by TOKFM, professor Andrzej Blikle, a mathematician (Blikle et al. 2016), said that in talking about the management of human resources we turned company employees into objects, although they as people deserved to be treated as subjects. In evoking the authority of Frederic Laloux, the author of *Reinventing Organizations* (Laloux 2015), the professor proposes to name this branch of management sciences “human relationship management in a company”. In a firm which is managed without a fixed and proscriptive hierarchy system, proper relationships existing between management staff and personnel, as well as between the managers themselves, and between the personnel should be based on mutual trust of all the people working in the firm. The following characteristics describe this trust:

- all workers are a team focusing on the purpose of the firm’s existence (creating products – including services- which benefit the public and are viable for the firm and individually for every team member),
- every employee is very conscious in considering himself/herself to be an indispensable link in the chain linking the team in their pursuit of the goal,
- whatever the task performed, every employee respects the work of others, which safeguards the dignity of every person, of every employee, even though, when looking from the outside, some tasks seem more important than other,
- with everyone managing their tasks by themselves, there is no hierarchy, no boss in the classic sense of this concept.

## **3. Where does the name turquoise firms come from?**

For Frederic Laloux, mentioned in the introduction, Ken Wilber, a philosopher and sociologist, who has, among other things, explored the history of the human consciousness evolution is certainly the person whom the author considers his mentor. This is manifested by numerous quotes bearing Kilber’s name cited in *Reinventing Organizations*, as well as Wilber’s foreword to Laloux’s book.

In characterizing the development of human consciousness, Wilber uses colors. He moves from scarlet red, amber, orange to green. F. Laloux uses these colors to name the management styles employed by firms, endowing the turquoise firms with the color of this precious gem – soft, periwinkle blue.

In the interview, professor Andrzej Blikle also shows how the color mirrors the style of human relationship management in firms. Scarlet red denotes the type of management of a firm and human relationships based on chiefdom, fear and short-term goals. Here we encounter a very clear division in terms of work and human dependencies along with the division into subordinates and superiors. This type of relationships exists in mafias, gangs. In this context, professor Blikle also mentions groups of animals (e.g. wolfpack), the view which the author of this paper does not share, as she believes that the communities of animals should rather bear green color.

Amber denotes a formalized hierarchy and is present in the Catholic Church, military, government agencies. Orange is associated with accountability and meritocracy, and profit and growth-oriented companies. According to professor Blikle, such relationships prevail in global corporations. Green color – denotes participative leadership, values-driven culture and is present in partnership organizations, co-operatives, family, and as mentioned before, in the communities of animals.

The evolutionary turquoise (soft, periwinkle blue) is a color denoting partnership and scattered leadership. One could say that if there are 20 people working in a firm, each of them is a boss and contractor at the same time. There is no fixed hierarchy, and, repeating the definition once again, relationships are imbued with empathy and mutual respect.

According to professor A. Blikle, the turquoise firms are constantly developing; yet in Poland there are several dozens of such firms, in Europe several hundred and worldwide they can be counted in thousands. In large companies, it is likely that only some departments have the turquoise color. In many countries there are associations whose emblems bear the turquoise as they are involved in promoting the idea behind those firms. Naturally, members of these associations have confidence that the ideas they believe in will one day spread across the entire branch of management sciences concerned with human relationships taking hold in various institutions and enterprises.

#### 4. Press reviews – for and against

The topic of turquoise firms was very fashionable from May to September of 2016. This was most likely due to the publication of the translation of F. Laloux's book *Reinventing organizations*. This trend is manifested in a vast body of information appearing on the Internet, which one could divide into two categories: positive and, as usual, some negative comments.

The positive comments tend to be a sort of reviews of F. Laloux's book, which not only praise its content but also the idea it presents. In general, the hope of those who have expressed positive views is that one day all companies will become turquoise (Workcited 2016; Kowalik 2015; Użarowska 2015).

In order to illustrate the characteristic features of the unfavorable opinions, I present an excerpt of one of them (Morbiato 2015), which raises doubts as to the practical application of this new management method. Broken down into a lot of smaller self-managed teams, having no bosses or medium level management staff, with staff positions reduced to the absolute minimum, the teams described in the book can, however, count on the support of coaches in their decision-making when facing difficult situations. "Unfortunately, at this point, a warning sign is triggered – a coach (a profession pursued by the author of the book) appears to be a guru, the fundament of this structure. What is more, the very language adopted in the firms organized in this way and in the book itself – "colleagues" instead of "employees, "role" in the place of "position", plus disavowing the Catholic Church (as a hierarchical structure), as well as such passages as: Personal development at this stage blends with a spiritual quest – often through a disciplined daily practice of meditation, yoga, altered breathing techniques or other methods that help to access non-ordinary states of consciousness – to experience, beyond separateness, beyond time and space, the oneness with all of manifestation are at times redolent of a sect recruitment and not of a scientific work, which the author (Laloux) certainly considers his book to be."

#### 5. Conclusion

Today, all management styles concerned with human relationships – from red to turquoise- exist simultaneously in various organizations and at a various rate. We can only hope

that the structure of those styles will be evolving to the benefit of the softer ones.

The idea of turquoise firms is certainly beautiful and should therefore be pursued, for it leads to the humanization of the relationships among firm employees. The conditions needed for the ultimate goal to be achieved, i.e. bringing all firms across the world to adopt the turquoise style are certainly not to be fulfilled for the humankind that is living today on our planet. That is because the idea is a star which is still light years away from all that which makes our current reality.

However, the structure, mentioned in the first line of the conclusion, of management styles used in companies could be improved by increasing the proportion of turquoise firms.

The author, however, believes that there might be some problems, for the implementation of all the principles characterizing turquoise firms is possible only in small teams involved in solving scientific problems predominantly concerned with innovation. With respect to larger firms, the introduction of “turquoises” is only feasible for selected teams engaged in the works mentioned before (innovation).

Moreover, it seems that every team, contrary to the key principle of the turquoise firm (no bosses), has to elect a leader whose role will be to coordinate works and act as a moderator in discussions focusing on solving problems.

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