

## Closing the gap: reinventing organizations for innovation and the disruptors who drive it

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### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to investigate the perceived gap between existing work environments and those desired by internal innovators and employees. Can the notion of evolutionary paradigmatic shifts be measured and mapped? And can this assist leaders attempting to implement profound organisational transformations needed to address social, technological, environmental, economic, and political realities facing organizations today? Inspired by Frederic Laloux's Reinventing Organizations, the current study features responses from 131 respondents at Deutsche Bahn. Initial results illustrate that evolutionary paradigms can assist leaders to identify and support intrinsically motivated individuals across organisations.

*Keywords: engagement; innovation; culture; organizational development.*

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### INTRODUCTION

This research stems from the authors' experience working with entrepreneurs and innovators in large organisations on four continents. Entrepreneurs and innovators resoundingly express a disconnect: They feel they do not fit in current organizational cultures and seek environments where they are able to use a fuller range of their expertise and energies, especially given the need to address complex challenges facing the world today.

These practical sentiments are echoed in scientific literature. A growing body of research addresses challenges organizations face as a result of 200 years of economic development and industrial growth, leading to an urgent need for innovation (Meadows, 1972; University of Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership (CISL), 2015). Increasing evidence points to that our industrial system has outgrown both planetary boundaries and human desires for meaningful work (Steffen, et al., 2015; CISL 2015). Recently there have also been reports on a global crisis of (dis)engagement: as much as 85% of employees are not engaged or are actively disengaged at work (Harter, 2017).

As a result, leaders in large organizations increasingly seek transformational approaches to the way they work. Theories of evolutionary development (Laloux 2014; Scharmer 2009; Senge 1990) offer leaders illustrative starting points for transformational dialogue. This article has three purposes:

- Situate a case organization's evolutionary development within interdisciplinary academic literature
- Report initial findings from a quantitative assessment based on evolutionary development theory
- Suggest additions and improvements to the assessment and avenues for future research.

Existing research underpinning evolutionary organizational development spans disciplines. Our research is driven by the question:

Can the notion of evolutionary paradigmatic shifts be measured and mapped? Can this assist leaders attempting to envision and communicate the profound paradigmatic transformations needed to address social, technological, environmental, economic, and political realities facing organizations today?

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### THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

#### Employee engagement and motivation

This work builds upon Kahn's (1990) seminal notion that employees engage fully and authentically in their roles based on their experiences in their working environments and the recognition that those experiences are socially constituted, not simply determined by individual

psychology (Bailey *et al.*; 2017). It confirms previous studies that illustrate a positive relationship between engagement and (task, job, company) performance, confirming engagement as a key factor in individual and organizational success (Bailey *et al.*, 2017). Its importance derives from past studies confirming the relationship between engagement and job satisfaction, turnover, and organizational commitment, illustrating its importance to retention and productivity (Bailey *et al.*, 2017). For leaders, ensuring a highly engaged workforce is essential; engagement begins in work environments with social practices, settings, relationships, and communication.

### Evolutionary organizational theory

Laloux's *Reinventing Organizations* draws from research on worldviews, values, and developmental stages to create an evolutionary theory of organizations, claiming "with every new stage in human consciousness also came a breakthrough in our ability to collaborate, bringing about a new organizational model" (Laloux, 2014). These changes are not limited to corporate entities; all types of organizations, including public institutions and non-profits, fit into the taxonomy (Laloux, 2016). No stage can be skipped; each is equally important. All paradigms are always represented to a greater or lesser degree.

One essential element of our research (based upon Laloux's work) is a shift from extrinsic to intrinsic motivation in later evolutionary stages. Clare Graves (Graves, 1966) referred to it as "Tier Two;" a shift from extrinsic to intrinsic purpose, drive, and motivation. Ariely *et al.*'s (2009) extensive research on intrinsic motivation confirms its importance.

Laloux focuses on the most highly evolved organizations (called TEAL) that bring together intrinsically motivated individuals in "wholeness" with an "evolutionary purpose" that extends far beyond themselves. Most organizations today sit further down on the evolutionary scale. This research focuses on organizations further down the evolutionary scale to raise the awareness amongst leaders about the gap between employees' perception of the organization's current operating paradigm and their desired operating paradigm.

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## METHOD AND DATA

### Background

The six paradigms in our initial survey are based, with minor alterations, on Laloux's *Reinventing Organizations* (see Annex 1). The most notable change is that names replaced colours for easier identification of the paradigm (see Table 1). We expected to find a mismatch between employees' perceptions of their organization's current

operations and their desired working environments expressed in paradigm.

**Table 1.** Translation of original paradigms to own identification.

Paradigms according to (Laloux)	Own paradigm Identification
MAGIC - MAGENTA	MYSTIC
IMPULSIVE - RED	POWER
CONFORMIST - AMBER	PROCESS
ACHIEVEMENT - ORANGE	GOAL
PLURALISTIC - GREEN	VALUES
EVOLUTIONARY - TEAL	VISION

### Research partner

Deutsche Bahn (DB) is the largest provider for rail and mobility services in Germany, handling most of the German transport of people and goods by rail and is also responsible for the national railway network and a range of other logistics and mobility solutions. With 300.000 employees, annual revenue of 44 Billion EUR (2018), and over 600 different legal entities, DB's largest shareholder is the German government.

In order to prepare the organisation for current and future challenges, DB has established four innovation units. Each has a different objective. The questionnaire was placed with the support of Skydeck, an internal Innovation Hub based at DB Systel GmbH in Berlin, Erfurt and Frankfurt (Main), which is responsible for supporting and implementing the digital transformation inside DB.

### Survey design

To identify intrinsically motivated internal innovators, a simple questionnaire was created to measure employee perceptions of their organization compared with their desired working environments.

The questionnaire referred to seven different aspects of a work environment:

- (i) dominant characteristics
- (ii) top priority
- (iii) decision making
- (iv) leadership
- (v) guidance in uncertainty
- (vi) reward/remuneration
- (vii) (work) environment

Each aspect was translated into a question. Each paradigm was present in one answer (see Annex 2). For two questions, there is an overlap in the answers; only two or three answer options are given. In this case, answers relate to more than one paradigm. For example, question 4 on leadership offered two answer options: four paradigms prefer singular leadership, while two paradigms prefer shared leadership. The two answers were mapped according to the respective paradigms.

To achieve an objective result for each participant, we used an “evolutionary scale” with a whole, sequential number for each paradigm. This approach is based on the idea that the development across the stages or paradigms is evolutionary:

MYSTIC → POWER → PROCESS → GOAL →  
VALUES → VISION

The scale was used to evaluate the gap between employees’ perceptions of the organization’s current operating paradigm (organization) and their desired working paradigm (individual). Assigning whole, sequential numbers assumes the paradigms are equally spaced. We allocated the highest number (6) to the earliest paradigm (MYSTIC) and the lowest number (1) to the latest paradigm (VISION).

The questionnaire contained complex concepts (for example power and leadership) which were not explained or operationalized in detail. Instead, the questions were designed to detect the relative difference between the subjective meaning of these concepts from the participants’ perspectives. The questionnaire was designed to quickly assess innovators’ perceptions of their organizations’ cultures or environments and their desired working conditions. Participants were allowed one answer per question. All answers were multiple-choice. The questionnaire contained 18 questions (7 on organisation, 7 on individual, 4 on demographics).

We tracked the highest, lowest, and amount of mentioning of a paradigm per respondent. The results are further split into actual and desired outcome.

Demographic questions were voluntary (required by Deutsche Bahn). More than 95% of participants gave all information, including email addresses. Feedback was offered to the individual based on their answers (preferred individual paradigm). This was communicated via email after data collection was complete. A follow-up webinar gave additional information about the context and results of the research.

### Delivery

Skydeck invited all employees with an email account to a workshop asking them to help change the company. Approximately 300 people participated in six workshops in four locations across Germany. The questionnaire was filled out by 131 participants who can be described as self-identified innovators, as they responded to Skydeck’s offer to support the change inside DB.

We shared the questionnaire URL with participants during each workshop. Printed copies were also available. 125 participants filled out the online version; 6 participants used printed copies. Responses were later transferred online to be included in the analysis.

### Demographics of Participants

**Table 2.** Age distribution of participants.

Age	# of participant per age group	% of participants per age group
20 - 29	42	32%
30 - 39	60	46%
40 - 49	20	15%
50 - 59	8	6%
60 - 69	1	1%
<i>Total</i>	131	100%

**Table 3.** Participant’s highest completed education level.

Education Level	% of Participants Completed Education Level
<i>Master (University / Polytech)</i>	63%
<i>Bachelor (University / Polytech)</i>	20%
<i>Vocational Training</i>	4%
<i>Other</i>	14%
<i>Total</i>	100%

**Table 4.** Participants by gender.

Gender	# of Responses by Gender	% of Responses by Gender
<i>Female</i>	47	36%
<i>Male</i>	83	63%
<i>No answer</i>	1	1%
<i>Total</i>	131	100%

### Data analysis

Answers were collected through [www.typeform.com](http://www.typeform.com), saved in clear text, exported to Microsoft Excel, and anonymized. In Excel, answers were mapped to the respective paradigm for analysis. All responses which lead to the same paradigm were aggregated. Some answers resulted in an overlap; they corresponded to more than one paradigm. Consequently, the maximum achievable number of points per participant was 12 (in each section: organisation and individual). Each paradigm could only achieve a maximum of seven points per participant. The data was analysed in two ways:

- (i) absolute number of points per paradigm: all points that were recorded for a particular paradigm were added and the absolute number of points per paradigm compared to each other (see Figure 2).
- (ii) highest number of points: the number of points per paradigm were added and the paradigm with the highest number of points recorded, according to:

$$x = \max (\sum \text{Mystic}; \sum \text{Power}; \sum \text{Process}; \sum \text{Goal}; \sum \text{Values}; \sum \text{Vision})$$

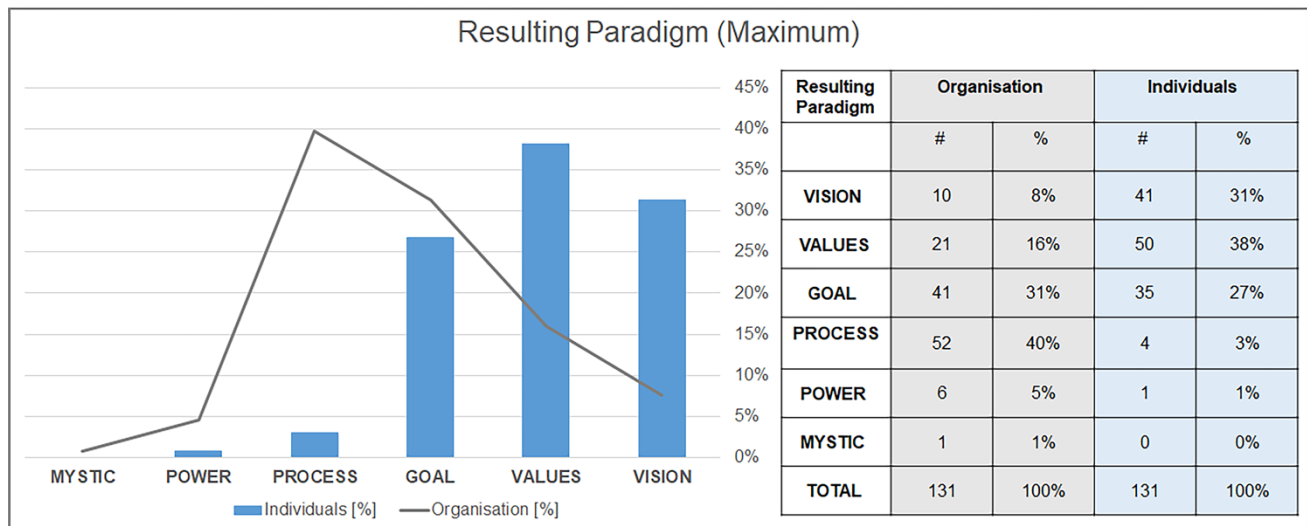
The Mann-Whitney-Test was employed to determine statistically significant differences in paired and unpaired continuous variables. The Kruskal-Wallis independent sample test was used to test whether the central trends of several independent samples differ from each other. A p value of  $p < 0.05$  was considered statistically significant.

## RESULTS

The objective of the questionnaire was to check for (mis)alignment between the working environment provided by an organisation, classified by paradigm, compared to the environment employees prefer or aspire to. Participants' perceptions of their current work environments (organisational paradigm) are illustrated as grey lines, while individuals' desired working

environments (individual paradigm) are illustrated as blue columns.

Figure 1 illustrates the results per paradigm, using the paradigm with highest number of points and later paradigm in case of overlap. The results show that most respondents perceived the organisation as PROCESS-based (40%), while individuals' paradigm of choice was VALUES (38%), followed by VISION (31%). The gap between the two groups is two paradigms (PROCESS vs. VALUES). In some cases ( $N = 36$  and  $N = 37$  for organisations and individuals), more than one paradigm had the same maximum value. In those cases, the paradigm with the later evolutionary score was chosen. To ensure consistency, we also analysed the outcome with the earliest paradigm in the evolutionary sequence. Statistical analysis revealed that these results are not significantly different to those illustrated in Figure 1 ( $p = 0.98$ ).



**Fig. 1.** Left: Summary of the number of participants with selected paradigm. Right: Absolute and relative number of participants with the respective selected paradigm.

Figure 2 illustrates that the absolute difference between the two groups is two paradigmatic levels. Points associated with each paradigm were added and compared. The most commonly perceived current working environment most closely aligns with the PROCESS paradigm with a total of 405 points (26%). The work environment desired by respondents is most

closely represented in the VALUES paradigm (357 points, 28%). There was a significant difference between the two groups (Kruskal-Wallis test  $p < 0.0001$ ). Therefore, the absolute difference between how individuals felt the organisation operates, and how they would like to operate, is two paradigms.

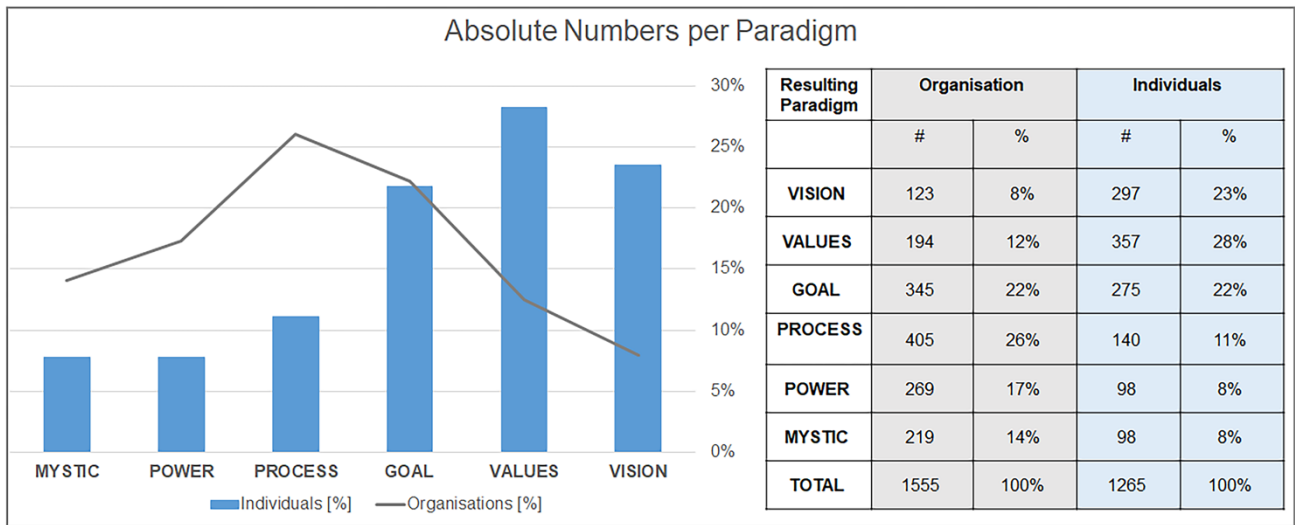


Fig. 2. Left: Perceived current operating paradigm and desired operating paradigm represented as totals for each paradigm. Right: Absolute values and percentages for organisations and individuals. The groups are significantly different ( $p < 0.0001$ ).

**Key motivators by participant**

To analyse the intrinsic motivation of self-identified innovators, we looked at the question “What is most important to you?” Figure 3 shows accumulated responses. The answers “Trust & Faith,” “Power & Control,” “Stability” and “Achievement” are driven by external forces or beliefs (deity, leader, process, goal). In contrast, “Personal Fulfilment” and “Positive Impact” are considered intrinsic motivators.

50% of respondents stated that Personal Fulfilment was most important. Another 17% stated that Positive Impact was of greatest importance, bringing the share of intrinsically motivated employees to 2/3 of the respondents. The questionnaire did not differentiate between specific values and visions but identified primary motivators.

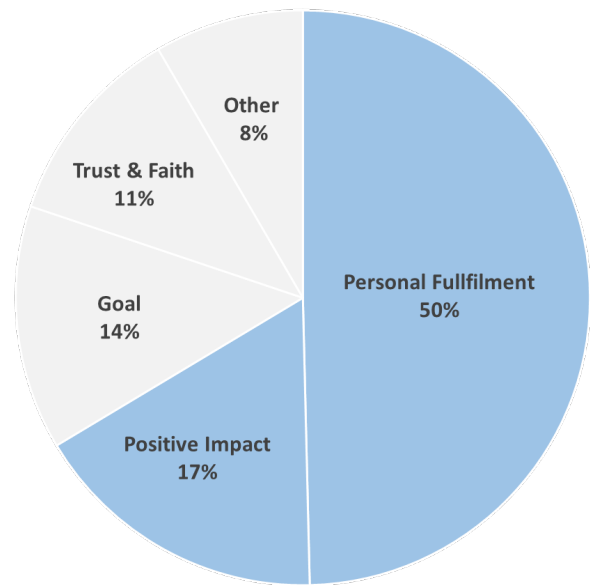


Fig. 3. Relative responses to the question “What is most important to you?”

**Paradigm selection by gender**

Another notable result is the gender differences shown in Figure 4. Although most respondents chose VALUES-based work (60% of females and 42% of males), there were significant gender differences ( $p < 0.0001$ ). The difference between the number of individuals who prefer VISION-based environments (15% of females and 31% of males) and VALUES is notable.

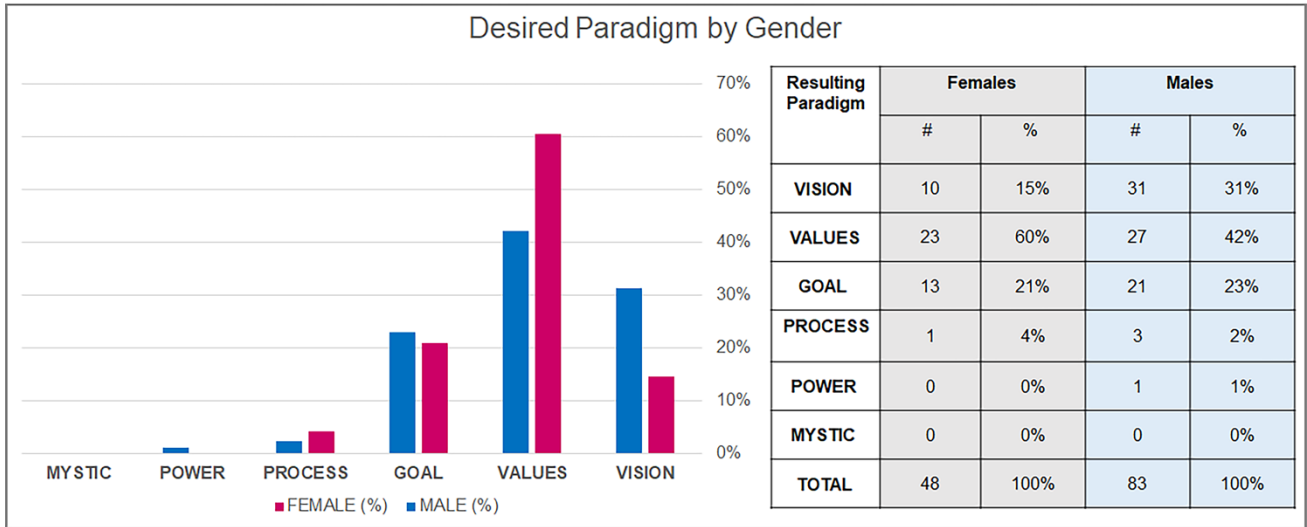


Fig. 4. Left: Summary of participants with selected paradigm. Right: Absolute and relative number of participants with the respective selected paradigm.

**DISCUSSION**

Results from 131 DB respondents indicate a gap between how self-identified innovators perceive their organizational environment and how they wish to work. This mismatch is consistent with global data on engagement and evolutionary theory.

With this visual representation, leaders can choose where to employ PROCESS and GOAL-oriented approaches, and where to use more evolved VALUES and VISION-based approaches. This choice could impact every aspect of the organisation, from recruitment and retention, to productivity and ability to adapt and innovate. Based on survey data, leaders can take concrete steps to influence the organisation by influencing the environment.

In addition, we did not expect such a high number of intrinsically motivated employees in a PROCESS-driven entity. However, this is consistent with global employee engagement trends (Harter, 2017); further survey comparison of the total employee population with self-selected innovators could provide guidance for organizational leaders charged simultaneously with both operational continuity and innovation. Innovators may be drawn to more evolved ways of working or may simply possess the drive and courage to articulate latent desires in the employee population. Future research with the general population could provide leaders clear conversational pathways to increased engagement and motivation in their workforces.

The survey data received points to a gender difference with female respondents more frequently selecting the VALUES paradigm and intrinsically motivated male respondents more frequently selecting the VISION paradigm. This offers practical guidance on how to retain, engage, and promote female employees and communicate with female customers. Based on

higher rates of VALUES-driven women respondents, leaders should focus on building inclusive, collaborative, empowering cultures built on a clear set of values employees can support and express together. This was a clear and surprising result that needs further research.

**CONCLUSION**

We set out to formulate a simple assessment based on evolutionary paradigms to assist leaders committed to identifying and supporting innovators within organizations. The data presented confirms and visually illustrates the different paradigms within a government-owned logistics and mobility organization (with a 2-paradigm PROCESS-VALUES gap); This gives us confidence that mapping working environments is possible and a valuable tool for leaders as they face increasingly complex and faster paced change with strategic, technical, and cultural challenges. Further research is needed to validate these findings, compare self-selected respondents with general populations, and benchmark progress toward closing the gap.

To address both employee engagement and today’s large-scale, systemic challenges, organizations must rapidly evolve to provide collaborative, meaningful, productive working environments. With this research we intend to support leaders and organizations in that endeavour.

This work is consistent with CERN IdeaSquare’s vision: to foster curiosity and collaboration for maximum societal impact. Both corporate and incubator/accelerator organizations face challenges creating environments that produce lasting, meaningful results as well as engaging and retaining the right people. One future test of the survey could compare challenge-based innovation models like IdeaSquare’s, against other

working environments, whether academic or corporate, to ascertain culture fit. Administration of the survey as pre- and post-tests around organizational change or pilot programs may also provide rapid feedback. Finally, gender differences in survey responses may provide useful guidance for encouraging and retaining girls and women in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.

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**ANNEX 1 – Paradigms according to Reinventing Organisations - Source: Laloux (2014), Fredric Laloux, page 16-36, 56**

<b>Paradigm / Model</b>	<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>World view</b>	<b>Leadership</b>	<b>Breakthrough</b>	<b>Examples</b>
MAGIC-MAGENTA (Own Identification: MYSTIC)	Humans went from living in small family bands to tribes of a few hundred, increasing social complexity. Cause and effect poorly understood; causality = magic. Gods & ritual important to manage magical entities. Trust essential; events inexplicable.	Wonder, mystery	Elder or other authority figure; commanding: shamanic rituals	Increased complexity due to limited differentiation of self	Small tribes
IMPULSIVE-RED / Wolf Pack  (Own Identification: POWER)	Approx. 10,000 years ago chiefdoms developed; emergence of ego and role differentiation + need for power and control. Clear division of labour with use of rewards and punishment to influence. Well suited for unstable environments. Power structures in flux; personalities jockey for influence.	Survival mode, fear and threat unite the group	Alpha or chief forcibly demonstrates power to retain position; authoritarian, predatory leaders.	Division of labour, command and control through influence	Street gangs, mafia, rivalries where stable social units have broken down, as in combat zones or dysfunctional cultures
CONFORMIST-AMBER / Army  (Own Identification: PROCESS)	Emerged when humans moved from tribes into horticulture and farming cultures. Bureaucracy and organization emerge. Self-discipline, self-control, order, and predictability valued. Comfort and stability in defined roles, rules, norms. Formal titles, fixed hierarchies, and organization charts bring stability to power. Pyramid structure. Individuals not seen for who they are; individuality not valued. May not adjust to change.	Stability through rigorous processes. Future is repetition of the past.	Leadership Style: top down command and control, paternalistic, authoritative	Breakthroughs: planning, processes, stable, scalable organizational structures (hierarchies)	The Catholic Church, government agencies, militaries, public schools
ACHIEVEMENT-ORANGE / Machine  (Own Identification: GOAL)	Application of an engineering or scientific perspective, goal orientation, and focus on solving problems. "Human resources" emerges built on belief that humans can question rules (with ingenuity, science) to engineer optimal organizational results. Organizations seen as well-oiled machines, capable of efficiency and effectiveness at the cost of people being treated as resources to be optimized.	Establish competitive advantage (through innovation), materialistic, quantitative (profit, growth), upward mobility honoured	Decisive management by objectives/goals (with some freedom on how to achieve them)	(incremental) innovation, accountability, meritocracy	Modern global corporations, management consultancies, investment banks
PLURALISTIC-GREEN / Family  (Own Identification: VALUES)	Relationships and ideals like fairness, equality, community, cooperation bring breakthroughs in empowerment (democracy, servant leadership), values-driven culture, and serving multiple stakeholders. Green organizations operate like families and may use family-based language even in corporate settings. They may be less efficient at delivering	Engage, motivate, and enrich through values-driven culture	Servant leadership, consensus, inspirational	Worker empowerment, inspirational values-driven culture; multi-stakeholder perspective	Ben & Jerry's, some NGOs, Southwest Airlines



	outcomes as they serve higher values. Individual engagement usually higher.				
EVOLUTIONARY-TEAL / Living Organism  (Own Identification: VISION)	<p>“Self-actualizing” level of the Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. Organizations as living organisms evolving within wider ecosystems. Trust and abundance replace fear and scarcity, ease replaces struggle. Experiences are opportunities for growth and development and to progressively discover purpose and true nature. Alignment and authenticity are paramount. They focus more on strengths and potential (vs lack and problems). They see themselves as part of an interconnected whole.</p>	<p>Self-management replaces hierarchy. Organization is seen as a living entity, purpose. Alignment and authenticity are valued.</p>	<p>distributed leadership, with inner rightness and purpose as primary motivators and yardstick</p>	<p>Self management, Wholeness, Evolutionary purpose</p>	<p>- Patagonia, Sun Hydraulics, Sounds True, Buurtzorg</p>

**ANNEX 2 – Questionnaire design: Questions, Answers and Paradigms (translated from German)**

Question	Answer / Assigned Paradigm					
	MYSTIC	POWER	PROCESS	GOAL	VALUES	VISION
1. Which group of personal traits is most dominant in your organisation?	Devout, Humble, Faithful	Tough, Strong, Brave	Precise, Predictable, Methodical	Ambitious, Goal-Focussed, Disciplined	Mindful, Collaborative, Encouraging	Authentic, Purposeful, Conscious
2. What is most important to your organisation?	Faith & Trust	Power & Control	Stability	Achievement	Positive Impact	Personal Fulfilment
3. How does your organisation prefer to work?	The organisation believes that my path is decided for me.	I like my boss to tell me what needs to get done next.	The organisation has clearly defined processes, which I need to follow.	The organisation has clear goals, which I need to achieve.	The team agrees how we may best serve the organisation's values.	I am asked to follow my intuition about what needs to be done next.
4. What kind of leadership does your organisation prefer?	Singular Leadership (Boss, Leader, Higher Power)	Singular Leadership (Boss, Leader, Higher Power)	Singular Leadership (Boss, Leader, Higher Power)	Singular Leadership (Boss, Leader, Higher Power)	Shared Leadership (Team, Council, Committee)	Shared Leadership (Team, Council, Committee)
5. Where does your organisation ask you to turn to for guidance, in the case of doubt?	Superior: Leadership, Supervisor, Higher Power	Superior: Leadership, Supervisor, Higher Power	Superior: Leadership, Supervisor, Higher Power	Peer: Family, Friend, Colleagues, Direct Reports	Peer: Family, Friend, Colleagues, Direct Reports	Introspection: Intuition, Meditation, Gut Feeling
6. What does your organisation typically compensate you for?	I trust that what I am given is the right level.	Depending on how the boss sees my work.	Depending on my level within the hierarchy of the organisation.	Depending on my performance.	Depending on what we have agreed as a team.	I attract what I need to improve my vision.
7. How would you best describe your organisation's work environment?	Even with big changes, we know we are looked after.	Thrive in uncertainty and change.	Is stable and predictable.	Has a level of constant (controlled) change and growth.	Is happy with big changes, if we understand how they contribute to better serve our values.	Changes fast to accomplish our vision as quickly as possible.