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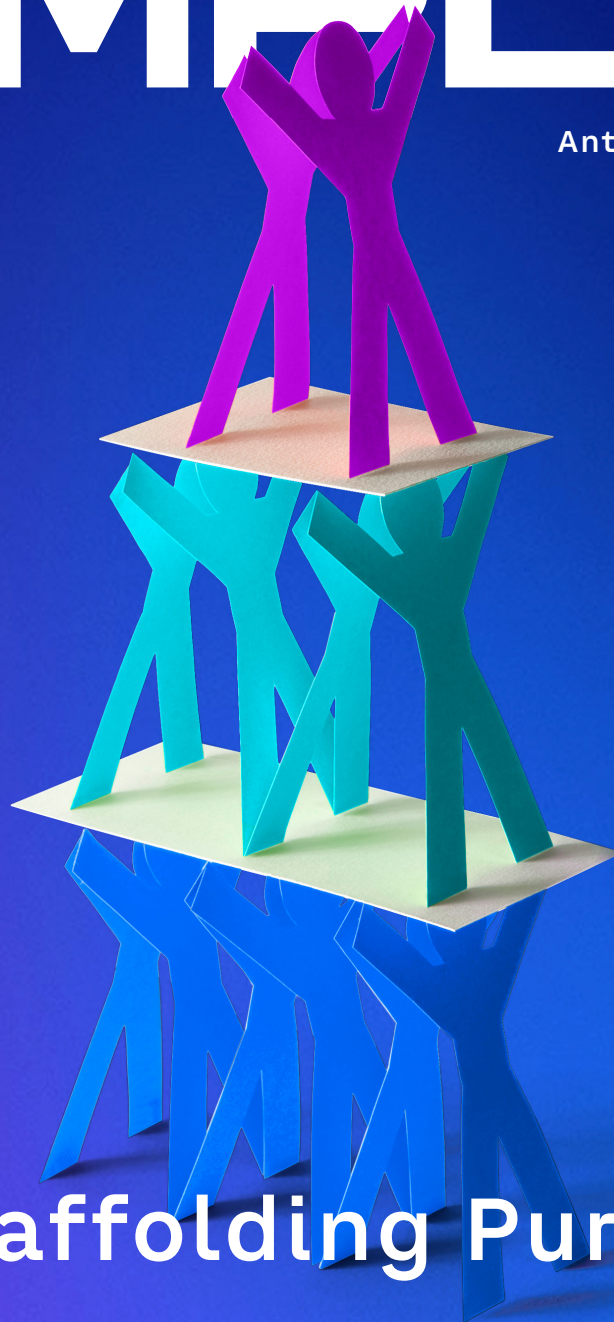
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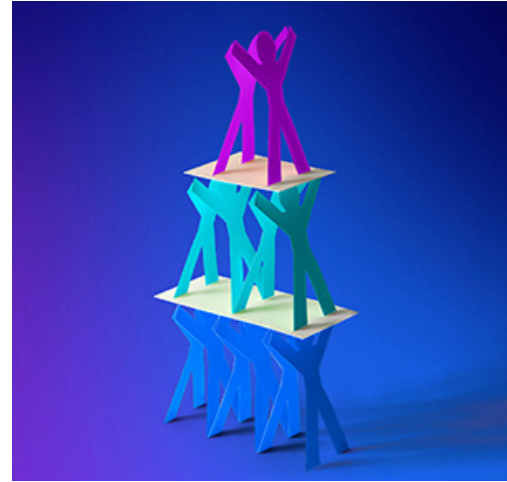
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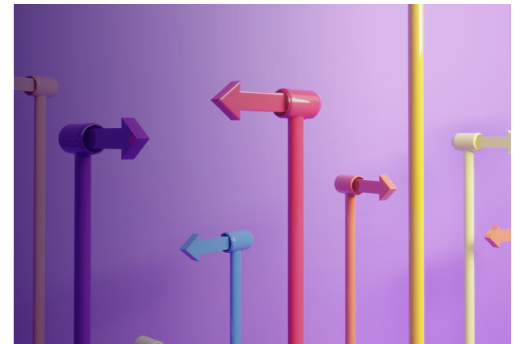
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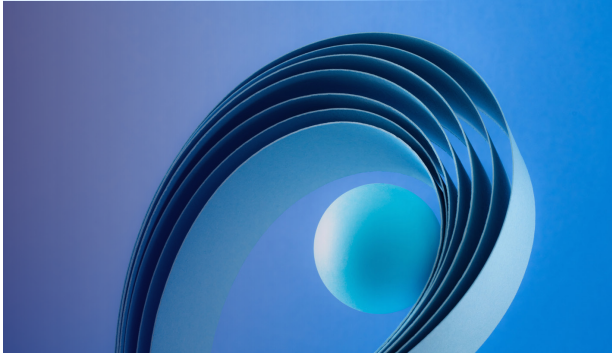


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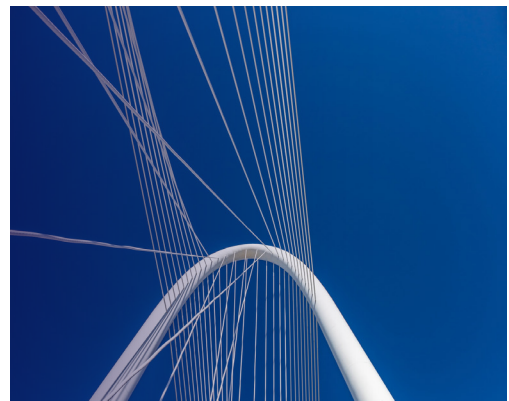
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SCAFFOLDING PURPOSE: AN INFRASTRUCTURE FOR HUMANITY

BY OANA BRANZEI AND DUSYA VERA,
GUEST EDITORS

Purpose is big business. Bestsellers, master classes, and apps teach us “how to purpose.” Why? The short answer is because we need it. Humanity faces multiple cross-roads. Torn between old-fashioned consumption and new-age guilt about privilege while witnessing heart-wrenching devastation from extreme climate events and the depletion of Mother Nature beyond its regenerative capacities, leaders are increasingly turning to purpose as a moral compass.

But do most leaders “have” purpose? If so, how do they “hold” it as they traverse various levels (individuals, teams, organizations, partnerships, sectors, regions, countries, continents) in their quest for success? The goal of the seven articles in the first installment of this two-part *Amplify* series is to demystify leaders’ journey to purpose.

Purpose-driven leadership begins with humans like you and me who seek to harness our humanity to create better ways of being and doing.¹

Then what?

Let’s walk the proverbial mile alongside 13 authors from Brazil, Canada, Germany, the UK, and the US willing to share their best practices about finding and following purpose, scaling it up and down, and translating it across problems and settings, all while staying out of purpose traps. We will discover how to create purpose for oneself, as well as how to create contagion of purpose, communities of purpose, and economies of purpose.

The focus of this *Amplify* issue is detecting and connecting purpose at various levels across the lifespan of purpose-driven leadership. The main takeaway is that having and holding purpose helps leaders shift from surviving to thriving in an inequitable world.

PURPOSE IS HOT

The long answer is that purpose is hot. From thought-leading forums to top consultancies to elite schools, we collectively turn toward purpose to search for better ways to do business. Purpose offers blueprints for organizing that some hope will answer many questions or at least offer a counterbalance to a growing distrust in alternative forms of governance. Is purpose-driven leadership better? There is growing evidence that it can be.

This issue features a series of rigorous academic research studies that have systematically reviewed how purpose (aka calling, meaning, values) has profoundly shaped not only how we organize our activities and societies but also our beliefs about leadership.^{2,3}

Of course, many generations of leaders have come of age and peaked power without explicit articulation of purpose. Many individuals who inhabited organizations sanitized of purpose are learning afresh what purpose means.⁴ Incoming cohorts question what purpose is and why for-profit firms need it.⁵ But at the end of a hectic day, most of us prefer leaders and companies that have and hold purpose to those that don’t.

There are several explanations for this collective preference, but two stand out. First, as we speak and share purpose across many types and sizes of organizations, we reinforce one another's identities as keepers and drivers of purpose.⁶ Second, as we activate one another's purpose, we can see farther and walk further together.⁷ The effects of identity-based and imagination-based mechanisms are mutually reinforcing: when leaders regard one another through a lens of purpose, they feel empowered to challenge the status quo and change the systems that no longer serve us. As purposeful leaders enact the change we want to see in our world, our identities mirror and mimic theirs, and vice versa.

If you'd like to take a shortcut through the growing pile of outstanding evidence, embark on a quick thought experiment. When you think about the leader you admire the most, can you quickly tell if they had and held purpose? Did their purpose help them enact a future significantly different from the past? Would you attribute the change they made to having and holding purpose? You can repeat this experiment a few times and try it out on unsuspecting peers. Although purpose has, until very recently, lurked undetected beneath stern statements of rationality and profitability, it comes through in other ways. Perhaps one of the best ways to tell whether a leader scaffolds purpose is by witnessing the widening circles of those who follow their example.

IN THIS ISSUE

Our first piece, by Hannes Leroy, Johannes Claeys, Mirko Benischke, and Daan Stam, features a powerful component of the leadership development programs at Rotterdam School of Management, Erasmus University, the Netherlands: the "I Will" statement, which connects individuals' personal ambitions with the challenges of today's society. The methodology of the "I Will" statement recently won the 2024 Academic of Management Award for the Best Professional Development Workshop in the Organizational Behavior Division. The authors share three sequential steps of scaffolding purpose, inviting us to move from "I Am" (discover purpose) to "I Will" (commit to purpose) and arrive at "We Will" (engage others with your purpose).

Next, Bill Fox delves deeper into this "I Am" by sharing his journey to purpose. The inner leader's journey is all about leadership of oneself. Fox shifts our attention from what leaders do to who leaders strive to become in the greater service of humanity. By describing his 13 steps to scaffolding purpose (including principles he extracted from his journey, personal experiences, and pointed questions for the readers), Fox invites us to awaken our own inner leader. We invite you to ponder his final question: "How will you awaken your inner leader to forge a future that reflects not just your own potential and purpose but the collective potential of all humanity?"

In our third article, Michael Messenger takes us a step further, to "I Will." Messenger explains how faith and calling weaved a purposeful path that took him from a partner at a leading law practice to president and CEO of the charitable organization World Vision Canada. He reminds leaders that a sense of calling is not limited to social justice activists or nonprofit leaders. All leaders follow their calling when they see their jobs as a way to align their values, vocation, and beliefs with a deep, purpose-driven commitment to a mission, a passion for their work, and a desire to positively impact the world. Messenger reminds us that commitment grows when purpose gets deeply personal, stating: "My faith informs my calling and thereby amplifies my sense of purpose." What amplifies your sense of purpose?

Next, Philippa White, bestselling author of *Return on Humanity: Leadership Lessons from All Corners of the World*, lifts us toward "We Will." White challenges today's leaders to outgrow the past, stating that "companies are working as if it's still the Industrial Age." As leaders come to care less about how much money a company makes and more about how they make that money, they discover many returns to purpose, including better relationships with employees and communities. How would being at your purpose today (Fox's "I Am") or committing to purpose today (Messenger's "I Will") create returns for the employees and communities on your path?

Anica Zeyen then explores some of these returns to purpose. As one's invisible purpose yields visible returns, many others may be inspired to follow suit. Zeyen explains how leaders can catch and pass on their purpose by recognizing and revealing their vulnerability. The article describes how the six protagonists showcased in Zeyen's documentary *Invisible* experienced purpose contagion in their own lives and looks at how featuring the documentary can facilitate similar ripples in educational institutions, consulting firms, and policy circles. As a disabled academic, activist, and documentary maker, Zeyen's purpose contagion can reach and serve 1.3 billion people with disabilities worldwide. How far and fast could your returns to purpose spread if you pivoted on invisible vulnerabilities?

In our sixth piece, Dee Corrigan, Lauren Elliott, Gethin Hine, and James McCarthy highlight The Purpose-in-Practice Community (hosted by A Blueprint for Better Business, a UK-based charity). Together, more than 200 business leaders are charting a path to putting purpose at the heart of business. Their article coaches leaders on how to drive purpose, how to become a purpose driver, and how to steer clear of purpose traps on their lifelong journey to success. The authors share key practices and set guideposts in the journey toward purpose.

Coro Strandberg closes the issue by urging us to radically reimagine the purpose of business. She calls for "social purpose" and blueprints the purpose economy. The article offers multiple strategies (identifying, consulting, and engaging the social purpose community; deploying purpose economy levers of change; and providing tools and resources for the business community and ecosystem actors) that can help regions and nations begin the process of architecting the purpose economy. Strandberg showcases the Canadian Purpose Economy Project, which aims to accelerate Canada's transition to the purpose economy and explains how ecosystem builders can help social purpose companies start, transition, thrive, and grow.

PURPOSE AS PROPERTY

As you enjoy the richness of these seven articles, we invite you to ponder this fundamental question: Who holds, experiences, and determines purpose?"⁸

Employing the metaphor of property goes beyond the intuitively appealing verbs (to have and to hold) and gives even the most purposeful leaders something more to work on. If we just take purpose as something we get to own and yield (as helpful it may be for our own identities and imaginations), are we leaving enough room for others to have and to hold theirs? If we eagerly give purpose to others, do we leave time and space to craft our own journeys to purpose?

We are excited about the levity of purpose when property gets shared up and down levels of hierarchy or ripples laterally through contagion effects, heartened by the power of communities of purpose and enthralled by the possibility that tomorrow's economies of purpose will create the returns on humanity many of us need and want.

The second part of this two-part *Amplify* series, "Scaffolding Purpose in an Era of Poly-Crisis," will explore how purpose is scoped, set, and grounded when much of what we have come to take for granted shifts suddenly and will help leaders get ready for the unexpected.

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DEVELOPING PURPOSE-DRIVEN LEADERS



Authors

Hannes Leroy, Johannes Claeys,
Mirko Benischke, and Daan Stam

We genuinely care about developing leaders who can be forces for positive change. In our leadership development programs (LDPs), whether regular degree-seeking or company programs, we begin by encouraging participants to discover and commit to their personal purpose by formulating an “I Will” statement that connects their personal ambitions with the challenges of today’s society.¹

We do not impose any goals on participants, allowing them to identify and dedicate themselves to a personal mission by articulating their I Will statement, which links their personal aspirations with the challenges of contemporary society. In this manner, participants are invited to discern how they can contribute to society in a distinctive manner. It has been shown that goals grounded in intrinsic motivation will have a more enduring and meaningful impact on society.

Perhaps more pertinent than *what* (i.e., personal purpose aimed at societal challenges) we aim to develop is *how* we aim to develop it.² A guiding principle to our developmental approach is being evidence-based.³ This involves a process of clear theoretical and pedagogical foundations that help steer the process and ongoing evidence collection (e.g., survey measures, long-term effects, randomized trials). This creates a feedback loop that lets us evaluate whether we develop leaders who can become positive change agents (and to course correct when we don’t).

This article contains lessons learned from attempting to develop purpose-driven leaders over the past decade. Our lessons are structured around three steps (see Figure 1) labeled as **I Am** (discovering purpose), **I Will** (committing to purpose), and **We Will** (engaging others with your purpose).

DISCOVER YOUR PURPOSE: I AM

Genuine purpose has the potential to give a career, and even one’s life, meaning and direction, but it has turned into a buzzword with various interpretations. At the Rotterdam School of Management (RSM), Erasmus University, the Netherlands, we ground purpose in one’s authenticity (one’s assumed true self) and thus one’s intrinsic motivation.

Intrinsic motivation is important because it offers more enduring and dedicated motivation than any extrinsically imposed purpose.⁴ Although discovering and understanding some sense of purpose in life has been a longstanding human quest, these crucial acts of sensemaking have become increasingly more pertinent and difficult.⁵ Influential thinkers like Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor refer to a feeling of alienation and a sense of disorientation and insecurity due to the breakdown of great frames of reference in society.^{6,7}

**INTRINSIC
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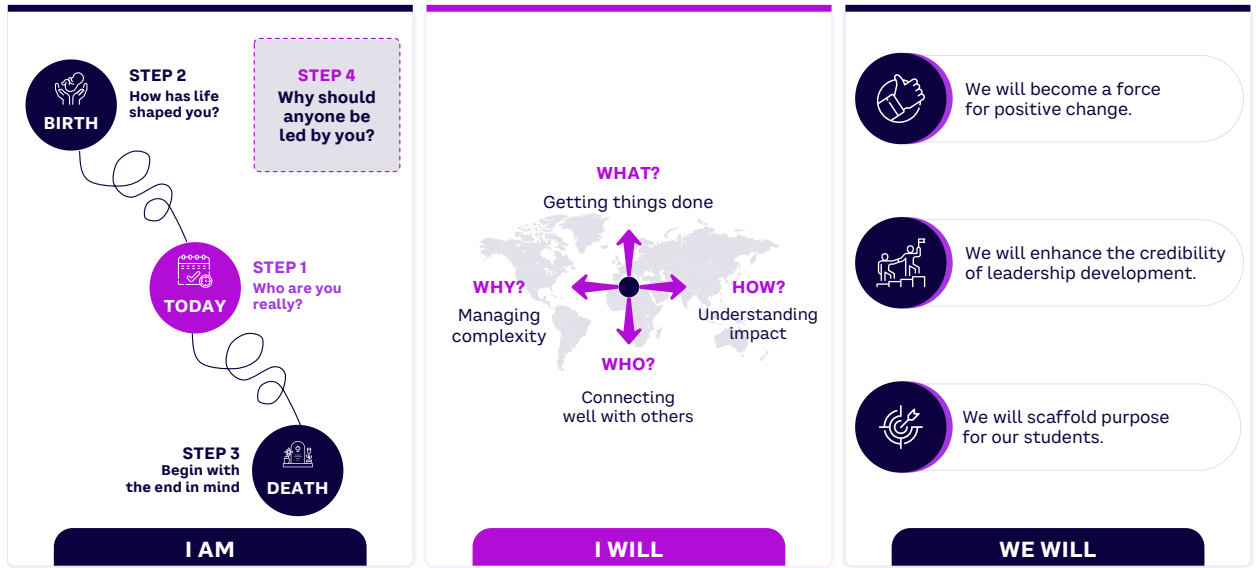


Figure 1. Three steps of purpose development at RSM

At the same time, this vacancy of structural or societally driven purpose has resulted in a thriving purpose “market.” We are inundated by a variety of potential purposes that are easily lost as we turn our attention to the next.

**DISCOMFORT
CAN ACCELERATE
DEVELOPMENT,
BUT ONLY WHEN
PEOPLE CAN
HANDLE THIS
DISCOMFORT**

When we connect purpose to authenticity, it is stably connected to the self, and that self can be meaningfully connected to societal challenges. In Figure 2, we highlight the three-step exercises we use to help people discover their authentic purpose: (1) discovery (2) tension resolution, and (3) narrative building.

The first step is for people to discover their personal purpose. We often assume that success in life is grounded in what society or others expect from us rather than being intrinsically grounded. Our leadership exercises aim to surprise people about what truly gives them purpose.

For instance, the first exercise asks people to share stories of happiness, talent, and meaning, with the intention of defying preconceived notions people may have about purpose. What’s important is creating sufficient space for mind-wandering (participants go out in nature to really let things sink in), allowing them to discover what emerges from within themselves rather than what is constructed.⁸

The next step is to induce and then resolve tensions. We are often unaware of the things holding us back. Through exercises like the near-death meditation (see Figure 2) we intentionally induce a tension between one’s current life and the legacy one wants to leave behind.⁹ We make sure it is not just a cognitive exercise (e.g., “What would people say at your funeral?”) but a well-guided meditation that helps people experience being forced to abandon the people, projects, and aspirations they fundamentally value. Our research shows that through tension we create epiphanies — aha moments that help us connect to our purpose.¹⁰

Without this deep and personal challenge, our fundamental reasons to live remain dormant until they are triggered and resolved in a psychologically safe environment. We cannot underscore this enough: our research indicates that discomfort can accelerate development, but only when people can handle this discomfort.¹¹ In other words, this near-death exercise comes with a “don’t try this at home” warning (unless there is a highly supportive setup with qualified individuals running the exercise).



Figure 2. Key ingredients to personal purpose: discovery, tension resolution, and narrative building

The third step is to build a narrative.¹² We ask people what moments and people have contributed to the person they are today and encourage them to answer the question: “Who are you, and how do you lead in life?” We encourage people to speak from the heart and refuse to give them time to prepare. That may seem daunting, but we find it increases the vulnerability of (and the personal connection to) the speech. What seemed like disconnected events are suddenly strung together into a melody that narrates the person’s leadership.

COMMIT TO YOUR PURPOSE: I WILL

Past leadership development programs have shown us that some of the knowledge or insights we offer to participants are fleeting unless participants can commit (i.e., targeted internalization and utilization) to the learnings.¹³

Developmental programs don’t always change behavior during the program (this would defy what we know about the slow pace of human change); instead, they prepare people for the hard work of enacting change later on.¹⁴ Indeed, the work on experimentation (flexing) encourages people to set behavioral intentions to learn.¹⁵

Intentions are one of the strongest predictors of behavior, especially when they are shared publicly through a powerful I Will statement, including your picture on our wall or in the form of an I Will speech (think TED Talk).^{16,17} We can testify to the power of a public outing that expresses and claims a specific leadership ambition with some audacity: article coauthor Hannes Leroy’s I Will statement is: “I will enhance the credibility of leadership development.”

In the second stage, we work with participants for about a year on the implementation of their plans. Specifically, we have participants address the following questions in a stepwise manner (taking one step forward every three months):

- What** needs to be done? Get clear on your vision, from “we will be the first to land on the Moon” thinking to the realistic subgoals toward success.¹⁸
- Who** are the stakeholders who can help (or hinder) your plan and how/when will you approach them?
- How** can you implement your plan, including navigating through roadblocks and stepping stones?
- Why** would people pursue this long after you are gone? How can you make this independent of you as a driving force?

We frequently challenge participants to address each of these elements and offer group sessions (and thus a shared community) with a team coach to help build toward success. We also offer individual mentorship if participants hit a dead end or have personal issues that cannot be dealt with in a group format.



Key to these shared moments and touchpoints is accountability (not just support). Participants know these are not the key developmental moments (those happen between sessions) but are about reporting, resolving issues, reflecting, and taking the next concrete steps in the development journey. This is an accountability group first and a support group second.

After one year of hard work by participants, we hold them accountable for product delivery. We want participants and the community they serve (organizations, spouses, and friends) to see the fruits of their labor, not just in idea format, but in viable entrepreneurial projects. Other than the intrinsic anchoring that fuels the passion to pursue these ideas, we believe our help in guiding ideas

to maturity and viability is what sustains these projects both extrinsically and intrinsically.

ENGAGE OTHERS WITH YOUR PURPOSE: WE WILL

In the first stage, people discovered their purpose, and with this came a sense of responsibility in its etymological meaning: the capacity to respond to a deeper calling. In the second stage, the element of accountability complemented the discovered responsibility. The third stage is about engaging others or the embeddedness of the leadership project in a specific community.

Discovering your purpose and committing to it is an act of personal leadership, but it is not yet an act of leading others. In this step, we encourage people to connect their personal vision to the vision of others, to the organization they work for, or to larger societal problems. This requires putting one's own perspective into a larger whole.

This is a crucial step because we often find that LDPs, especially ones that focus on purpose, lead to people quitting their job, leaving their spouses, and/or disrupting their current life in the name of authenticity and purpose.¹⁹

Authenticity is important, and we try to cultivate it in the first two steps, but in this last step, we contextualize authenticity within a larger whole. We ask individuals to not only come up with an I Will speech but to work toward a We Will speech. How can they convince others to align with their personal vision and mission? How can they connect their intrinsic motivation to the intrinsic motivation of others?

Our research indicates four key elements for an effective We Will speech:

1. **Competence.** Is the goal or objective believable and achievable? To what extent has the participant come up with a realistic plan that builds on their competencies?
2. **Warmth.** Does the participant have the best interest of the followers at heart? Consider the extent to which the participant can take the perspective of the follower and have that reflected in his or her speech.

	JOB DESIGN	RECRUITMENT	TRAINING	SELECTION	PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT	REWARD	RETENTION	SEPARATION
	How are jobs designed?	What type of people do you attract?	How do you socialize/train people?	On what criteria do you select?	How do you manage performance?	How do you reward & promote?	How do you retain good people?	How do you separate bad people?
CURRENT APPROACH								
DESIRED APPROACH								

Figure 3. Designing a system to translate, implement, and share your leadership vision

- 3. **Charisma.** Does the participant appeal to others with the vision? To what extent can the participant convincingly demonstrate that they own the vision and are the right person for the job?²⁰
- 4. **Integrity.** Does the participant put the vision into practice? Here, we consider the extent to which the participant can articulate the values behind the vision and put them into action.

Of course, words alone are insufficient to implement the vision, so we ask participants to simultaneously work on the design characteristics that support their vision. In Figure 3, we show a deceptively simple exercise to follow the work done in the previous steps.

The exercise asks about the current and desired steps on key aspects of managing people, but it requires participants to take a long, hard look at how to reengineer structure to match their purpose. It is usually a team or organization being reengineered, but it could easily be applied to a society.

In this stage, we make it clear how leaders, after discovering individual purpose and meaning and becoming willing to be held accountable, must translate their vision to an organizational reality. In this way, they become the architects of a structural blueprint for their vision and influence others, so they experience the positive spiral boosted by the interaction of responsibility, accountability, and community.²¹

In this way, leadership development moves beyond leader development, creating a ripple effect that allows others to see their unique contribution while connecting their daily life or work with timeless aspirations, whether on an organizational or societal level.

CONCLUSION

Scaffolding purpose is not easy, as it involves the complex task of connecting one’s personal self to societal demands. In this article, we outlined three steps toward scaffolding purpose, with practical tools available for a wider audience to adopt or adapt. We hope that, beyond offering these tools, people will pick up on the lessons we have learned over time on how to effectively set people on a track toward purpose.

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THE INNER LEADER'S JOURNEY TO SCAFFOLDING PURPOSE & AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP



Author

Bill Fox

Leadership in today's world isn't about position or title. It's about awakening to our essential nature and bringing that awareness into everything we do. This is the journey of the inner leader. It's a path that's as crucial as it is misunderstood.

The inner leader path is the journey we all must take in the 21st century.

— Dee Hock, founder and CEO emeritus, Visa¹

In a world fixated on doing and getting immediate results, the concept of an "inner leader journey" often falls on deaf ears. It's a path that doesn't make sense to many. It seems too intangible and perhaps even irrelevant in the face of a business world focused on getting things done. However, as Albert Einstein, Stephen Covey, Eckhart Tolle, and many other luminaries teach us, true transformation begins with a change in our consciousness.²

In its purest form, leadership is not about titles, strategies, or even actions. It's an expression of our authentic selves. It's our essence beyond our ego. When we operate from this place of deep awareness, we naturally inspire others. It's about embodying a state of consciousness that others can sense and resonate with. The most powerful leadership doesn't come from doing, but from being. It's not about becoming a better leader, it's about letting go of the obstacles that prevent our natural leadership qualities from shining through.

This journey of inner leadership is not one that can be fully understood intellectually. It must be experienced. Often, it takes exposure to someone already on this path for others to awaken to its profound impact and possibilities.

Despite its transformative potential, the inner leader journey remains a path less traveled. As Joseph Jaworski and other luminaries in this field have observed, many resist this journey due to comfort with familiar leadership paradigms, fear of the unknown, and societal conditioning that reinforces ego-driven approaches.

The vulnerability required and the need to surrender control often conflict with traditional notions of leadership. The journey demands we confront our deepest fears and step into our true power, which can be profoundly uncomfortable, but this discomfort is precisely where growth occurs. The path of inner leadership may be challenging, but its potential for personal and organizational transformation is unparalleled. As we navigate the complexities of the 21st century, embracing this journey becomes essential for those who aspire to lead with authenticity, wisdom, and lasting impact.

**THE MOST
POWERFUL
LEADERSHIP
DOESN'T COME
FROM DOING,
BUT FROM BEING**

For 13 years, I've been on this journey. I didn't start with a clear destination or the realization that I had started on an inner journey. I just knew that something in the way we approach leadership and organizational change wasn't working and set out to find a better way.

As I share my journey, it's important to realize that what comes next is not a roadmap or a set of steps to follow. The inner leader journey has no fixed path. It unfolds differently for each person and organization. I offer these waypoints as reflections from my journey. I hope they spark insight for you on your unique path. They are not prescriptions; they are invitations to explore your own inner landscape of leadership.

We're going to explore how this inner journey can scaffold purpose for yourself, your team, and your organization. We'll look at how it can transform not just how you lead, but who you are as a leader. And we'll consider why this matters now, in an age of AI and rapid technological change.

Rather than focusing on external challenges, inner leadership is about accessing a deeper intelligence and leading with conscious awareness and authenticity. It's about seeing our evolving world as part of our unfolding consciousness.

CONNECTING THE DOTS

You can't connect the dots looking forward; you can only connect them looking backward.

— Steve Jobs³

Steve Jobs's iconic 2005 commencement address at Stanford University highlighted the importance of trusting one's journey even when the path isn't clear. As I reflect on my journey, I'm reminded of Jobs's wisdom. I can see how each step, each encounter, and each realization has been a dot in a larger picture that only now comes into focus. My journey began in 2009 when I left my corporate career, driven by a desire to address the persistent issue of failed organizational change initiatives. This decision marked the first dot in what would become a transformative path.

Just as Jobs encouraged the graduates to have faith that the dots would somehow connect in their futures, my journey unfolded through a series of 13 meaningful steps that, looking back, form a coherent narrative (see Figure 1).



Figure 1. The inner leader path (source: LeaderONE)

1. BE A CATALYST TO CHANGE SOMETHING BROKEN IN THE WORLD

Reflection: The journey begins with recognizing that the world is calling for healing and that we are the ones to answer that call. This realization can be the spark that ignites the quest for inner leadership.

Personal experience: Throughout my 40-year career in corporate America, I noticed that many change initiatives aimed at enhancing organizations failed to bring genuine or lasting change. In 2009, after playing a key role in driving yet another corporate change initiative to a significant achievement, I saw all our progress vanish with the arrival of a new leadership team. Disheartened by this pattern, I resigned without having another job lined up, determined to find a way to change this.

Purpose connection: This recognition can scaffold purpose by aligning our actions with a greater cause, providing a foundation for meaningful leadership.

Question: How does my journey of addressing organizational change resonate with your own experiences or desires to make a difference?

2. THERE'S GREAT POWER IN SMALL STEPS ALIGNED WITH A LARGER PURPOSE

Reflection: Small actions aligned with a larger purpose can lead to significant improvements.

Personal experience: Unsure of where to start, I created a list of 70 ideas and discussed them with colleagues. One idea stood out: interviewing experts and asking them, "What improvement strategy or tactic has worked the best for you?"

Surprisingly, most of them shared insights that went beyond their well-known areas of expertise and shared something much deeper. This interview series (and later book) was called *5 Minutes to Process Improvement Success*.⁴

Purpose connection: These small, aligned actions scaffold purpose by creating tangible progress toward our larger goals, reinforcing our sense of direction and impact.

Question: Reflecting on your own journey, what small actions have you taken that unexpectedly aligned with a larger purpose? How did they unfold?

3. PARTICIPATE IN THE EMERGING FUTURE BY SHARING YOUR INSIGHTS

Reflection: Publishing or sharing insights is not just about contributing to a conversation. It's about participating in the collective consciousness. Your participation itself will shape you and your consciousness in unexpected ways.

Personal experience: In the summer of 2012, Cutter Consortium issued a call for papers on the topic of blending agility with structured standards. I saw this as a chance to share important insights gained from discussions with leading experts and practitioners in the field. My central argument was that the ongoing debate persists because our collective focus is misplaced, and we must ask better questions. This idea was contrary to the prevailing opinions and practices at the time, and I was initially doubtful it would be accepted for publication due to its controversial nature.

To my surprise, not only was the article published in the next issue of *Amplify*, it garnered support and positive feedback from many people. Moreover, it opened several unforeseen opportunities for me.

Purpose connection: Sharing insights can scaffold purpose by connecting our individual experiences to collective growth, amplifying our impact and clarifying our role in shaping the future.

Question: How has sharing your insights shaped your growth? What possibilities do you see in your experiences for contributing to your field or community?

4. HARNESS THE POWER OF INTENTION

Reflection: Drawing from what I've learned about the power of intention, this waypoint stresses the importance of aligning one's deepest values with one's actions. This sets the stage for a journey of authentic leadership.

Personal experience: In 2012, I came across *Do You QuantumThink?* by Dianne Collins, a book that reshaped my perception of reality.⁵ Collins illustrates that by actively embracing new thought patterns, we can profoundly alter our reality. This insight is grounded in the quantum concept that the observer's viewpoint significantly influences the reality observed.

My transformative journey progressed in 2014 with *Synchronicity: The Inner Path of Leadership*, by Jaworski.⁶ Jaworski highlights the crucial need for aligning our deepest values with our actions, asserting that such alignment forms the essence of genuine, authentic leadership. It's through our intentions that we enact this alignment.



Purpose connection: Setting clear intentions can scaffold purpose by providing a conscious framework for our actions, ensuring they align with our deepest values and aspirations.

Question: How have your intentions, whether conscious or unconscious, shaped your leadership journey so far? What insights does this reflection offer you?

5. THE MAGIC OF SYNCHRONICITY

Reflection: When we step into the unknown where there is no path, the universe delivers to us moments of synchronicity. We begin to recognize the interconnectedness of our paths and the universe's role in guiding our journeys.

Personal experience: In 2009, leaving the traditional corporate world marked the start of an unexpected journey for me, with the right people and opportunities naturally aligning on my path. For example, I met Jaworski in 2014, and he introduced me to the concept of synchronicity in leadership. Jaworski's idea that our lives are influenced by meaningful coincidences, urging us to see them as integral to a vast, interconnected universe, profoundly resonated with me. His teachings revealed that these synchronistic events were not happenstance but crucial markers leading me to a deeper leadership understanding and increasing my capacity for impactful change.

Adopting Jaworski's outlook, I embraced synchronicity, seeing it as a powerful force that has guided me to live more authentically and purposefully, with a leadership style rooted more in who I am than what I do. This approach both propelled me forward and deepened my alignment with my core values, transforming my professional and personal life.

Purpose connection: Recognizing synchronicity scaffolds purpose by revealing the interconnectedness of our journey, reinforcing our sense of meaning and direction in leadership.

Question: How have unexpected events or encounters influenced your path? What might these experiences reveal about your journey toward authenticity and purpose?

6. CONVERSATIONS THAT MATTER

Reflection: True leadership is found in the power of dialogue — not just as a tool for communication but as a means of connecting deeply with others and the emerging reality.

Personal experience: True leadership is deeply embedded in the power of dialogue, transcending conventional communication to foster profound connections and reveal new realities. My pivotal experience at a workshop led by Jaworski, inspired by theoretical physicist David Bohm's insights, transformed my understanding of dialogue. Bohm says dialogue is not merely a way to exchange ideas, it's a transformative process that facilitates a collective exploration, allowing truth and shared understanding to emerge spontaneously without preconceptions.

This workshop illuminated the essence of genuine dialogue: creating a space where participants can collectively uncover insights beyond personal biases through openness, listening, and suspending judgment. Bohm's vision of dialogue challenges us to engage deeply, enabling leaders and participants to co-create a future aligned with our shared human experience. In essence, true leadership involves facilitating spaces for collective wisdom to guide us, leveraging the transformative power of dialogue to navigate complexities and co-create harmonious futures.

Purpose connection: Engaging in meaningful dialogue can scaffold purpose by co-creating shared understanding and collective wisdom, enriching our leadership vision.

Question: How have meaningful conversations shaped your leadership journey? What have these experiences taught you about creating spaces for collective wisdom?

7. THE JOURNEY TO A FORWARD-THINKING WORKPLACE

Reflection: Learn to embrace the relentless forces of change to create innovative leadership and transformative workplace cultures.

Personal experience: In 2016, I embarked on an insightful journey with the launch of "Forward-Thinking Workplaces," an interview series in which I engaged with pioneering business and thought leaders through six foundational questions. This exploration led me to author another article for *Amplify*. That article, titled "A Forward-Thinking Workplace,"⁷ sheds light on innovative approaches to leadership and organizational change in the face of today's relentless challenges.

Through this work, I aimed to uncover deeper understanding and strategies for creating workplaces that are not only adaptive but thrive on change, contributing to the evolution of leadership from within. This experience underscored the importance of forward-thinking leadership in navigating the turbulent waters of constant change, complexity, and disruption. The forward-thinking approach offers a path toward transformation that moves from the inside out.

Purpose connection: Embracing change can scaffold purpose by keeping our leadership relevant and adaptive, ensuring our actions remain aligned with evolving needs and opportunities.

Question: How has your understanding of what makes a forward-thinking workplace evolved through your experiences? What personal insights have you gained about fostering innovation and embracing change?

8. A NEW UNDERSTANDING OF HOW THE MIND WORKS

Reflection: Discovering a new understanding of how our mind works is crucial. This knowledge empowers us to lead from a place free of distraction and ego with greater insight and capacity to listen more deeply.

Personal experience: Most people are trapped by their own thoughts and sense of self. Our perception of the world is shaped by our upbringing, past experiences, and emotions. This isn't a personal failing; it's the result of societal conditioning from a young age. Nevertheless, a part of our identity transcends the confines of the mind. Liberating ourselves from the dominion of thought is essential for flourishing and achieving enlightened leadership in today's world.

WE CAN CREATE SPACES FOR OURSELVES & OTHERS

My transformation in this regard was profoundly influenced in 2016 by Michael Neill's *The Inside-Out Revolution*.⁸ Neill's insights are rooted in Sydney Banks's "Three Principles," which articulate a new understanding of how the mind works.⁹ When I achieved this understanding, my mind quieted significantly and opened new pathways of understanding. Although there are many avenues to this kind of breakthrough, my experience through Neill's work stands out as a pivotal moment in my personal development. Engaging with the teachings of Tolle alongside Neill and Banks can steer your journey toward a deeper, more expansive existence beyond the conventional thinking mind.

Purpose connection: This understanding can scaffold purpose by freeing us from limiting thought patterns, allowing for more authentic and impactful leadership.

Question: How have you explored an expanded understanding of your own mind and how it might influence your leadership approach? What shifts have you noticed in yourself if you've explored this area?

9. GUIDING LIGHTS ON THE PATH

Reflection: Throughout our journey, we encounter guides and mentors whose wisdom profoundly influences our path. These people provide us with the knowledge, tools, and encouragement needed to navigate the trials and transformations of our quest.

Personal experience: Marilyn Jacobson, author of *Turning the Pyramid Upside Down*, was a pivotal guide in my journey.¹⁰ Our paths crossed when a publicist reached out to me, requesting a review for Jacobson's newly released book, which profoundly resonated with me.

Our connection deepened through a serendipitous meeting at a conference where I discussed her work in one of my presentations. It was through Jacobson that I discovered Jaworski's work, which had a significant impact on my personal development and my professional endeavors.

Purpose connection: Mentors and guides scaffold purpose by offering wisdom and perspective, helping us refine and elevate our leadership vision.

Question: How have mentors or guides influenced your inner leadership journey? What unexpected lessons emerged from these relationships?

10. EXPANDING HORIZONS IN THE SPACE BEYOND BOUNDARIES

Reflection: We can create spaces for ourselves and others that help us expand beyond conventional boundaries. When we listen and learn from each of our unique perspectives, we transcend our existing boundaries.

Personal experience: In the spring of 2020, as the pandemic brought the world to a standstill, I found myself questioning the relevance of my work in the face of unprecedented global change. My pause was interrupted when I learned about the passing of Jacobson, whose wisdom had guided me through many challenges. Her death prompted me to go back to her teachings, and to my surprise, I found her insights more pertinent than ever in our upended world.

Sharing these revelations with my mailing list, accompanied by a visual representation of her concepts, resulted in an unprecedented wave of feedback and support. The experience inspired me to begin writing and creating designs about all the people, ideas, and events that had influenced my inner journey.

Purpose connection: Expanding our horizons can scaffold purpose by broadening our perspective, allowing us to envision and pursue more impactful leadership goals.

Question: How has expanding your own horizons changed your perspective on leadership? What personal boundaries have you transcended, and how has this impacted your journey?

11. EMBRACING THE UNKNOWN

Reflection: Stepping into the unknown with no expectations can lead to unexpected growth and innovation. By embracing uncertainty, we open ourselves to new possibilities and tap into our innate creativity

Personal experience: The response to my writing on my journey with the inner leader and the designs I was crafting caught me off guard. It fueled my desire to dive deeper, even though I was unsure about my ability to sustain this creative endeavor. Venturing into design using simple shapes was new territory for me. Initially, I was at a loss for words and ideas for creation. Each week presented a moment of confrontation where, in sheer frustration, I would throw my hands up, faced with no idea what to write about or create.

Four years and more than 200 articles and 300 designs later, I sit down to create with the same admission: I start with nothing. Somehow, my most compelling pieces emerge from this void as

though by magic. As author Marianne Williamson suggests, “Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate [but] that we are powerful beyond measure.... We are all meant to shine, as children do,” underscoring the immense potential that lies within embracing our own light and journey into the unknown.”

Purpose connection: Stepping into uncertainty can scaffold purpose by fostering adaptability and creativity, essential qualities for purpose-driven leadership in a changing world.

Question: How has embracing uncertainty shaped your leadership journey? What has it taught you about yourself and your approach to challenges?

12. A NEW ITERATION OF SELF, PURPOSE & LEADERSHIP

Reflection: The inner leadership journey often leads to profound moments of personal evolution that reshape our understanding of leadership and our purpose and place in the world.

Personal experience: LeaderONE represents the pinnacle of my efforts over the past 13 years, weaving together the entirety of my work into a vision to transform leadership and the workplace. We’re not just about adapting to change or implementing best practices; we’re about reinventing ourselves and activating leadership across every level to pioneer the future.

At LeaderONE, we encourage people to embark on an inner odyssey to lead with vision and achieve breakthrough success, leveraging a blend of innovative strategies and personal growth. People begin a leadership journey that champions innovation and prepares them and their organizations to navigate and shape the 21st-century landscape with confidence and purpose.

Purpose connection: These transformative iterations scaffold purpose by continually aligning our leadership with our evolving self-understanding and the changing needs of our world.

Question: How have the various experiences in your journey come together to shape your current understanding of leadership? What unexpected connections have you discovered?

13. THE QUEST FOR SELF-DISCOVERY

Reflection: The inner leader journey is about discovering our true purpose and essence and how it connects to the larger tapestry of life.

Personal experience: I've discovered that true leadership is the manifestation of our deepest truths. It's estimated that upward of 90% of people in the Western world are stuck in their thinking mind and mind-made sense of self. As a result, true self-discovery remains elusive.

In the relentless noise of the external world and our own minds, the real challenge is silencing the mind's clamor to uncover the clarity and wisdom that lie beneath.

Understanding that we are the awareness behind our thoughts (rather than the thoughts themselves) is pivotal for authentic leadership. It calls on us to let go of our mind-made sense of identity and embrace our true essence. The journey toward authentic being involves personal transformation and redefining leadership in a rapidly evolving world. It is a call to forge a future where leadership stems from our deepest connections and collective wisdom.

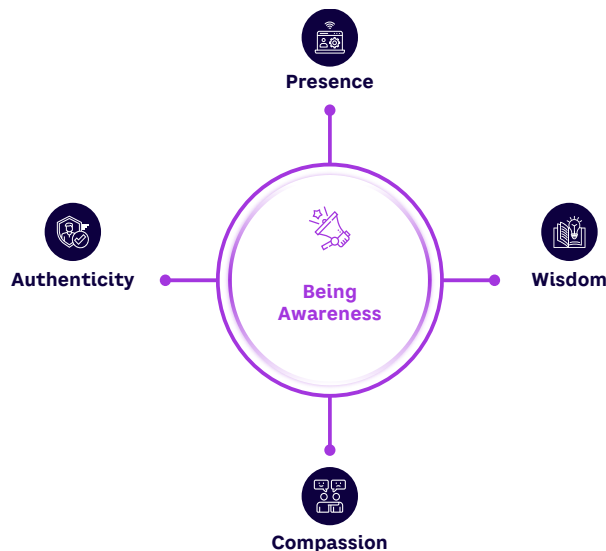


Figure 2. Leadership rooted in inner awareness interconnects presence, authenticity, wisdom, and compassion, all emanating from a core of Being Awareness (source: LeaderONE)

Purpose connection: Self-discovery scaffolds purpose by revealing our authentic self, providing a solid foundation for genuine, impactful leadership.

Question: How has your quest for self-discovery influenced your leadership style? What inner wisdom has emerged that surprised or challenged you?

UNLOCKING YOUR INNER LEADER FOR A TRANSFORMATIVE FUTURE

The narrative I've shared redefines purpose-driven leadership for the 21st century from an inner perspective. It's a paradigm rooted in self-awareness, interconnectedness, and the limitless potential of the human spirit.

But the path doesn't end there; it calls on each of us to step forward and apply these insights to our own lives. An understanding of purpose as an emergent quality of authentic being (rather than an external goal to be achieved) is at the heart of scaffolding purpose through the inner leader journey. It reinforces the idea that true leadership and purpose stem from our deepest connections and collective wisdom, as we've seen throughout the waypoints of this journey.

Figure 2 illustrates how leadership rooted in inner awareness interconnects presence, authenticity, wisdom, and compassion, all emanating from a core of Being Awareness. This visual representation reinforces the concept that true purpose isn't found externally but emerges naturally as we align with our authentic selves.

I invite you to consider this final question: how will you awaken your inner leader to forge a future that reflects not just your own potential and purpose but the collective potential of all humanity?

Let these waypoints assist you in illuminating the way toward transformative growth and impact. Guided by our shared insights, let's embark on this transformative path together, forging a new leadership paradigm for our time.

SCAFFOLDING PURPOSE THROUGH THE INNER LEADER JOURNEY

As we reach the end of this exploration, it's important to remember that the waypoints I've shared are not a map for you to follow. The path of inner leadership is as diverse as the individuals who embark on it.

As I reflect on my 13-year journey, I realize that each step, encounter, and insight has been a crucial part of scaffolding my purpose, even when I didn't explicitly recognize it as such. The inner leader path, as articulated by Jaworski and experienced in my own life, provides an insightful example of scaffolding purpose in a way that is authentic, transformative, and deeply meaningful.

This journey has taught me that purpose isn't something we find externally or force into existence. Instead, it emerges naturally as we align with our true nature, embrace synchronicity, engage in meaningful dialogue, and courageously step into the unknown. It's a process of continuous unfolding: each experience builds upon the last, creating a sturdy scaffold that supports our growth and impact in the world.

For organizations and leaders looking to scaffold purpose, the lessons from the inner leader journey offer several valuable insights:

- Embrace synchronicity and remain open to unexpected opportunities.
- Cultivate deep, meaningful conversations that allow collective wisdom to emerge.
- Continuously expand your understanding of yourself and the world around you.
- Be willing to step into the unknown and trust in your innate creativity.
- Align your actions with your deepest values and truths.
- Recognize that true leadership comes from within and is about who you are being, not just what you do.

By following this path, we can create workplaces and leadership paradigms that are not only more effective and innovative but also more fulfilling and aligned with our shared human potential. The journey of scaffolding purpose through inner leadership is ongoing, always inviting us to deeper levels of awareness, authenticity, and impact.

As we navigate the complexities of the 21st century, may these waypoints guide us toward a future in which purpose is not a statement on a wall but a lived experience that transforms individuals, organizations, and, ultimately, our world.

You have to trust in something — your gut, destiny, life, karma, whatever — because believing that the dots will connect down the road will give you the confidence to follow your heart, even when it leads you off the well-worn path, and that will make all the difference.

— Jobs¹²



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Bill Fox, founder of LeaderONE.org and Forward Thinking Workplaces, champions a vision that transcends traditional leadership and transformation paradigms. He envisions a future where technological advancement and personal growth harmoniously coexist, with leaders driving innovation while cultivating self-awareness for the greater good. Mr. Fox guides leaders to transform their approach through inner wisdom. Author of *The Future of the Workplace* and curator of global thought leader conversations, he explores key insights like the power of intrigue over problem-focus and creating impactful workplaces. Mr. Fox believes great leaders are built from the inside out. Through writing and workshops, he awakens the inner leader, demonstrating how to harness technology while staying connected to human values. He can be reached at bill@billfox.co or via LeaderONE.org.



**HOW CALLING &
FAITH AMPLIFY
PURPOSE:
A PERSONAL REFLECTION**

Author

Michael Messenger

After more than 30 years working alongside charity leaders, I have learned that when you ask one of them why they work in the social sector, they often say something like: “I feel *called* to the mission of my organization.” A sense of calling connects with something deeply personal, reflecting what they believe about who they are and who they want to be — to the point that they feel drawn to the role.

Calling is anchored in deeply held values, often alongside religious belief. For many, calling is foundational to their decision to work for organizations that don’t pay as well as similar positions in for-profit companies, have relatively limited resources, face some sacrifice, or tackle seemingly insurmountable problems (e.g., fighting poverty or injustice). Because calling is linked to intrinsic motivation, it can compensate for limited opportunities for financial gain or career advancement. In this sense, calling can affirm and even amplify a leader’s sense of purpose.

That has been my own experience. In 2007, I had just been made a partner in a leading law firm when I was offered a leadership role at World Vision, an organization to which I had been connected since completing an internship there after my undergraduate degree. From an outside perspective, my decision to step away from my law career did not make sense: the compensation was less, and it required leaving a flourishing career and moving my family across the country. Yet the opportunity to bring my skills, experience, and values to bear on the issue of children’s rights and well-being felt right, and it connected to a meaningful purpose more significant than my sense of self-interest.

The path has not been straight or easy, but many years later, I can say that I do not regret leaning into my sense of faith and calling to the role and this mission. It has brought joy, personal and professional satisfaction, and strong alignment with my perception of who I am and what I am meant to do, leaving me with a deep sense of fulfillment and contentment.

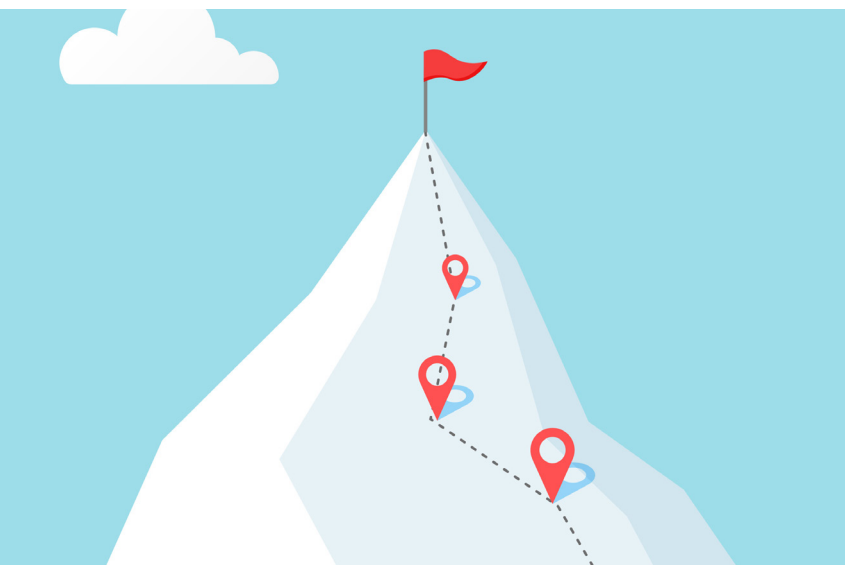
A meaningful sense of calling is not limited to social justice activists or nonprofit leaders. As I listen to executive MBA students and colleagues at business school, many from the private sector, they directly or indirectly refer to a sense of calling when describing their emerging sense of purpose. They don’t usually lean on the language of “being called” to provide reasons for otherwise unlikely career decisions, and they may feel uncomfortable sharing such values-laden or religious concepts in a business context. Nevertheless, many see their jobs as more than just the means to an end — it’s a way to align their values, vocation, and beliefs with their business’s mission, creating a strong sense of connection and engagement. Calling in this setting is characterized by a deep, purpose-driven commitment to a mission, a passion for work, and a desire to positively impact the world.

BECAUSE CALLING IS LINKED TO INTRINSIC MOTIVATION, IT CAN COMPENSATE FOR LIMITED OPPORTUNITIES FOR FINANCIAL GAIN OR CAREER ADVANCEMENT

CALLING & PURPOSE

For this reflection, I distinguish *calling* and *purpose*. Both are essential for creating meaningful leadership and work experiences but operate at different levels and scales. Although these concepts inevitably overlap, I consider calling as profoundly personal, internal, and intrinsic: unique to an individual. Calling is often linked to ideas outside ourselves, including religious faith.

For business leaders, calling might be characterized by a passion for a particular field and a desire to contribute to a more significant cause than oneself. This can lead individuals to choose careers or business paths that align with their values, talents, and interests as closely as possible. Calling is often associated with passion and personal fulfillment.



I consider purpose to be broader. It can apply to both individuals and organizations. Purpose is the overarching mission or reason for being that guides actions and decisions. In a business context, this is often articulated as a statement of a company's values and goals, explaining why it exists beyond making a profit. It might include commitments to sustainability, social responsibility, innovation, climate action, or supporting global frameworks like the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Purpose contributes to a strategic direction and framework within which decisions are made, helping to align the efforts of all stakeholders.

Purpose can be shared by a group or organization, serving as a unifying vision that guides collective action. The purpose of a business shapes its strategy, culture, and impact on society.

This distinction may seem artificial, but I point out these differences to show that a personal, professional, or business purpose can perhaps exist without an identified sense of calling. However, when individuals tasked with building an organization's strategy and its teams are anchored to a deeper understanding of calling, their collective purpose can be amplified. In my experience, *calling deepens purpose*.

CALLING & FAITH

For many, calling is connected to a deeply held set of values, frequently based on or linked to a personal religious expression. Something or someone is doing the calling through some form of explicit or implied revelation, providing an external spiritual scaffold or framework for personal purpose.

Religion remains a critical personal driver for many around the world. For example, in my country of Canada, although religiosity has been declining, in 2019, more than two-thirds of Canadians reported having a religious affiliation, and more than half (54%) said their religious or spiritual beliefs were somewhat or very important to the way they live their lives.¹ Therefore, it is not surprising that many leaders consider faith in their understanding of vocation and calling, whether privately or publicly.

Frequently emphasized in Christian thought, the concept of calling has parallels in other faiths and philosophies.² At the risk of oversimplification, and although there is always a diversity of interpretations, we can see examples in many leading faiths. In Islam, calling is related to submitting to divine will and pursuing justice and compassion. Buddhism emphasizes the path to enlightenment as a calling, focusing on compassion and wisdom. In Hinduism, the idea of *dharma* (duty) reflects a form of calling that involves living by ethical responsibilities and social expectations. Indigenous spirituality emphasizes harmony with the land, respect for all living beings, and the importance of serving the community. Jewish religious texts contain teachings from prophets

like Micah, who emphasize that true faith must be reflected through ethical living. Building on this shared perspective, Christians look to Jesus, who modeled how we should live through his life and words. For instance, in the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus emphasized that his followers must care for those in need and see it as a spiritual act, showing compassion, social responsibility, empathy, and solidarity with those in need — and do so without strings attached.³

People who do not ascribe to a particular set of religious beliefs but profess openness to a broad spirituality may still look outside themselves for inspiration and guidance to inform their calling. Even for a secular humanist, calling can find an anchor in human-centered values rather than divine mandates or religious obligations.

As I live out my calling linked to my purpose in my vocation and professional life, my religious faith deepens my purpose by motivating my actions, helping shape my priorities, and informing my decisions and values.

CALLING & FAITH AMPLIFY PURPOSE

My faith informs my calling and thereby amplifies my sense of purpose. When I felt a call to my role, my Christian faith informed my decision-making, providing a filter for discernment as I sought affirmation of my chosen direction. Other leaders in my network share similar experiences and some common perspectives on how engaging with faith deepens their purpose:

- **Faith helps deepen personal meaning-making.** Values and faith provide a way of organizing decisions and actions that deepen meaning. By using their faith's ethical expectations as a framework or filter, leaders can rely on an external source to validate action.
- **Faith provides connections and community.** Many people of faith are part of a community of like-minded people who gather to create a sense of belonging, support, encouragement, and even challenge in following the tenets of faith and leaning into a sense of calling. Relationships in the context of faith can foster empathy, compassion, and humility, qualities that enhance a leader's ability to connect with and inspire others.

- **Faith looks both inward and outward for identity and to validate calling.** As they consider their calling and purpose, followers of religious belief can anchor in their potential, often seen as God-given, which provides internal support for their identity as an instrument for action. Also, through prayer, community discussion, or peer support, people of faith look to others, including the divine, for insights and input.
- **Faith can oppose self-interest.** When leaders look for meaning and value outside their own experience and interests, calling informed by faith provides a set of expectations that consider interests broader than our own. Faith usually sees the needs of others as equal to or more valuable than our own. It helps us look outward and drives us to consider community and global needs.

Through those insights, faith can amplify purpose, but the reverse can also be true. Purpose can amplify one's faith — by giving shape to broad expressions of value and turning belief into action that goes beyond theology or principle to be put into practice through career and leadership.

CHALLENGES TO CONNECTING FAITH & PURPOSE

Bringing faith into conversations about calling and purpose is not without challenges. Personal religious beliefs and expression can be seen as exclusive when carried from a private setting into a more public one. In most North American secular business settings, there are expected limits to (or concerns about) engaging in faith-related conversations, especially in the context of organizational strategy and purpose. Leaders may be afraid that discussions of faith to describe calling could move beyond questions of values or motivation toward proselytism. Focusing on how faith finds commonalities in values and direction is a way to mitigate this.

For individuals, although faith can deepen a sense of purpose, if personal circumstances or lack of opportunity prevent them from living out what they feel is the true expression of their faith- and values-based calling, they risk a sense of disappointment or failure. Understanding that purpose is a journey and that calling can be both an aspiration and an inspiration (even during change) can prevent calling from being seen as a destination.

Understanding faith as a list of rules and expectations divorced from personal passion can make a certain kind of purpose performative. Faith should enhance calling in a way that is not about just meeting expectations but about leaning into an individual's full potential. That is why I love how Christian author and theologian Frederick Buechner explained the concept of calling: "The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet."⁴ When we connect our joy with the world's needs, we find our calling in the most profound sense.

HOW LEADERS CAN NURTURE CALLING

For leaders committed to finding purpose for themselves, their teams, and their organizations, showing openness to talking about calling — including recognizing the role of faith and values — can provide an opportunity to expand the understanding and conversation about purpose. Faith and calling connect to their values, linking personal and professional life. Calling provides additional foundations for understanding and deepening purpose, building resilience and confidence, even in the face of change.

Businesses and organizations led by individuals with a clear sense of purpose deepened by their own sense of calling can prioritize practices, social responsibility, and sustainability as they are driven by a desire to live out their values by contributing to society. In this way, calling can powerfully shape individual careers and businesses' broader direction and impact.

In for-profit contexts especially, leaders may face pressures to balance financial performance with ethical and social responsibilities. However, those who view their work as a calling can find resilience in these challenges, drawing strength from their commitment to their mission and values.

As leaders, we can nurture the benefit of calling and amplify purpose by making space for conversations about calling. In faith-based organizations like mine, conversations about faith are part of the fabric of organizational life. Even in secular environments, encouraging respectful and inclusive discussions about calling can allow staff to more easily integrate their values with the organizational mission.

LIVING OUT CALLING & PURPOSE

Purpose amplified by calling has continued to shape my leadership and guide organizational priorities. One could argue that World Vision has an "extreme" purpose, focusing on making a positive impact on the most vulnerable children around the world, coming alongside them in the face of conflict, disaster, and injustice.

When I witness suffering in these contexts, my faith helps give meaning to even difficult experiences. I am not immune to feelings of despair, sadness, or frustration. I do not always get it right, but I usually rely on my deep sense of calling to use those emotions as fuel for action: sharing stories of need and hope with Canadians, advancing policy advocacy for children's needs over many years, and ensuring we do all we can to demonstrate impact.

Whether I continue to serve at World Vision or in another organization, my purpose, informed by faith, will anchor how I can live out my calling in a way that contributes to improving our world.

I suggest that for other leaders, this can be a new way of thinking about personal purpose — not just in extreme situations, but in how we show up each day. It starts by making space for and valuing how each of us may feel a sense of calling to who we are and how we can contribute to making our teams, our organizations, and the world a better place.

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About the author

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THE POWER OF PURPOSE



Author

Philippa White

A sailing regatta known as the “Refeno” runs from Recife, Brazil, on the northeast coast to the famous island of Fernando de Noronha, covering a challenging 300 nautical miles. Competing in that regatta was a wooden trimaran called “Ave Rara.” When Ave Rara was racing, it was valued at just US \$40,000. The boat competed for 16 years and won in its category 15 of the 16 times it raced.

But that’s not what is impressive.

Four times, Ave Rara — against all odds, competing against high-tech carbon boats worth millions of dollars and sometimes skippered by Olympic sailors — won the prestigious Fita Azul award (the award for being the first boat to cross the finish line).

Despite the stark financial and technological contrasts, Ave Rara, led by its sole professional sailor, Gustavo (Guga) Peixoto, and a rotating crew of amateurs, triumphed repeatedly. The sailing conditions were always grueling and dangerous — 22 hours of relentless and cold water spray — but the crew’s resilience and unity prevailed.

Each year, Peixoto inspired his team with a shared sense of purpose, excitement, and determination. This was never about money, fame, or even the award. It was always about believing in a common mission.

Ave Rara’s success stemmed from emotional engagement, connection, and a shared purpose, which proved more powerful than any bottom-line criteria.

In this article, we examine reasons for increased employee disengagement and what it’s costing business. We then look at companies getting it right (where people are excited about going to work and feel psychologically safe to innovate), why it’s a competitive advantage, and how leaders can create those more human company cultures.

**TRUST IN
BUSINESS IS
CURRENTLY
AT ITS LOWEST
LEVEL EVER**

THE INDUSTRIAL AGE IS OVER

Trust in business is currently at its lowest level ever. The “2024 Edelman Trust Barometer Global Report” recently revealed that only a minority of people globally trust businesses to do what is right, reflecting widespread skepticism and concerns about corporate integrity and transparency.¹

This isn’t great news for business.

When people aren’t engaged and don’t feel a connection to something, there are massive consequences. This is why absenteeism is currently through the roof; people are calling in sick more than ever, and many employees are simply checking out (either showing up for work and not engaging or quitting altogether).

And this is costing companies billions.

In fact, disengaged employees cost US companies up to \$550 billion a year, according to a 2023 Gallup report.²

You see, companies are working as though it's still the Industrial Age. They believe that focusing on profit is the only way to run a business. It worked then because products and services were uniform and based in one region, and executive thinking was independent.

Workers clocked in, did the basic work that needed to be done (with the manager barking orders), and then clocked out. The quality of life wasn't great or aspirational, but it worked in that context. Nothing personal — only business.

Do we honestly think that this scenario works now?



We are now in the technological and digital age. Business is much more interconnected. We are more interdependent, our competitors are also our allies, and change is more fluid. The work is global, the challenges exponentially more complex, and the solutions require creativity and involvement from various sources, sectors, and regions. People are also demanding transparency, to the point where transparency is fundamental to the way business needs to be done (to create trust and connection) — and because of technology, you can no longer hide.

We're at an inflection point. The power is shifting into the hands of people: customers and employees. More than ever, there is a competitive urgency to create spaces and cultures where people want to work and that make them happy. The leaders who can do this will win; these leaders put human values like kindness, empathy, vulnerability, imagination, creativity, and courage first. Spaces need to be created where people like what they do, feel psychologically safe, feel empowered, aspire to do their best, want to come up with great ideas and solutions, and want to stay.

Engaged employees have major consequences on companies: Gallup found that engaged teams are 21% more profitable, and happy employees are 400% more innovative.³

This, of course, makes sense.

When people believe in what they are doing and feel a part of it, they create better customer service. When employees feel psychologically safe to innovate, they push their thinking further and happily voice their ideas. They are excited about going to work, don't often miss work, feel like they are a part of the solution, and don't quit. And if people aren't leaving, then companies aren't spending billions to replace them.

GETTING IT RIGHT

So who's currently getting this right? And what does that look like?

In my book *Return on Humanity: Leadership Lessons from All Corners of the World*, I bring this thinking to life with a handful of inspiring examples. Here's one below about GOOD Agency, the first company I worked for in London after graduating from the Ivey Business School back in 2001.

I arrived in London shortly after the 9/11 attacks, and it was a grim economic period; the odds weren't in my favor. However, through various contacts and connections, I was fortunate enough to meet one of the partners of Ideas Unlimited, a small communications company based in Battersea, London (which later turned into GOOD Agency).

At that time, Ideas Unlimited was run by three directors: Chris Norman, who oversaw the charity portfolio (the area I worked in when I worked for them), and two others who managed commercial brands such as events, horse shows, property, and luxury goods. Over time, the not-for-profit arm of the business grew to encompass about 90% of their work. Norman was passionate about promoting a human-to-human approach to business —connecting with humanity and values rather than focusing on self-interest and commercial outcomes.

Initially, this mission was primarily realized through their charity clients, as it was thought this was the only way. However, Norman soon realized that although the charity sector was important, it didn't have the reach, influence, or financial power to make a significant impact on a global scale. He concluded that real change needed to happen within the business sector. Shortly afterward, Ideas Unlimited evolved into GOOD Agency, with Norman as the sole director.

GOOD's work shifted to helping clients define and promote their purpose, demonstrating the positive social and environmental impacts they could achieve while creating value for stakeholders and benefiting the business's bottom line. Norman believed that communication was the strongest weapon for creating change. Brilliant ideas need to be communicated clearly, concisely, and compellingly to make an impact. GOOD's focus was not on traditional ad campaigns but on overall delivery, doing, and behaviors — real impact was at the core of the company's ethos.

GOOD's first significant project was with Mars, helping it define and understand its environmental positioning. Mars's staff didn't appreciate the importance of having a sustainable supply chain. To address this, GOOD created a traveling photo exhibition to re-engage Mars's internal staff with supply chain and corporate sustainability practices. The exhibition illustrated how the company sourced cocoa and sugar, the benefits of relationships with farmers, and how sustainability impacts communities.

From then on, Norman's work with clients focused on helping them connect with the human story and make things meaningful. He emphasized the importance of considering all stakeholders, not just shareholders. This included employees, communities, and everyone impacted by their products. As he explained: "Marketing and sales lack meaning if they don't have purpose." This philosophy guided GOOD as it evolved, staying true to Norman's mission of making a difference by changing the system.

THE HUMAN ORGANIZATION

I hadn't seen Norman in years, but on a 2023 trip to London, we met up. I was eager to understand more about the company's work, especially in the context of Britain's economic crisis post-pandemic: a recession, a cost-of-living crisis, and the rise of AI. I wondered if his business had been negatively impacted, suspecting that perhaps, in this challenging context, purpose had been shelved in favor of cost-cutting and a return to business as usual.

I joined him in the company's bustling, colorful office in South East London for a meeting over a cup of tea. I asked about his team size, and he told me they had just over 60 employees, with room for another 20, as the agency was growing rapidly. I observed a positive energy as I walked past breakout rooms, a library with bright yellow chairs, and groups of people happily discussing projects. It was clear from our conversation that the need for corporate purpose was greater than ever.

Norman shared that people now want to know two things when they go for interviews: how the company makes money and who they are making that money for. If they don't like the answers, they don't want to work there. He explained that huge companies in the UK financial services sector are struggling for talent due to a lack of meaning in their work.

Norman recounted a recent conversation with an investment firm and how he's helping its leaders think through some big questions. For example, how can an investment firm alleviate wealth or social inequality? He agreed that these are hard questions to reflect on but said that if they don't know the answers, it's important they try and find them. "It's about creating change, being committed to that change, and being authentic. If you can't demonstrate your commitment, you're a fraud," he said.

As we continued to reflect on the return of being more human and having purpose, Norman confirmed that the return is better relationships: they are better with customers, with employees, and with communities. "The world is built on relationships, and that is what more human organizations deliver," he explained.

Norman's commitment to authenticity is evident in GOOD's status as a B Corporation, a certification for for-profit companies meeting high standards of social and environmental performance, public transparency, and legal accountability to balance profit and purpose. GOOD is also employee-owned, with a staff council that advises the executive team and holds the company accountable. Norman encourages ideas from all levels within the business, fostering an environment where individuals can bring their whole selves to work.

Norman's journey reinforces the importance of taking purpose and meaning seriously. Kindness, humility, honesty, vulnerability, and a vision are crucial for staying on the right path. As he put it, "If you don't catch up, you will soon be irrelevant and then extinct. It will happen to you, so seriously think about how you plan to respond."

Now, more than ever, companies need to understand the importance of creating human company cultures. But simply wanting to create these cultures isn't enough. The million-dollar question is how they can be created. They don't just happen — it's impossible to have human company cultures without leaders who are tapping into their human competencies. You can't have one without the other.

GOLD DUST

So, as we finish this article, let me leave you with something to ponder.

If we know we need leaders with human competencies to create competitive company cultures, what can we do with the leaders that we have?

The good news is that everyone has access to human competencies. It doesn't matter where you come from, how much money you have, where you've been educated, or where you fit into society. It's the "gold dust" we all have at our fingertips.

The problem is that the pressure of education, work, society, family expectations, and culture have conditioned these "soft skills" (or, rather, "power skills") out of us. We've been taught that being kind, vulnerable, compassionate, empathetic, and humble is a weakness, not a strength.

But I can tell you, after 20 years of rewiring talent to create successful, more human company cultures, everyone remembers how to tap back into these human competencies. They just need to be shown how to see the value and given permission to do things in new ways.

For two decades, we have challenged leaders to push beyond the boundaries of their mental maps, gently nudging them into uncharted territories. This approach has sparked revolutionary and game-changing transformations in individual and team behaviors. The result? Better leaders who build better companies that ultimately contribute to a better world.

We are at a pivotal moment in the future of business — a time to pause and reflect. Will you continue to prioritize profit and hope for the best? Or will you recognize that the path forward lies in reshaping leadership to generate profit through a focus on people, and it's crucial to equip leaders with the human competencies needed to foster cultures of engagement, trust, and shared purpose among employees? If you only aim for the bottom line, you will miss the mark. Remember, culture and people must come first.

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Philippa White is a global thought leader, social innovator, and founder/CEO of TIE Leadership. For more than 20 years, she has been unlocking the potential of corporate leaders and teams through her distinctive approach to leadership development. Ms. White brings a people-first approach to business, driving not only commercial success but also fostering a more sustainable world. Throughout her career, she has worked with some of the world's largest companies, helping teams develop the necessary human competencies needed to thrive in today's corporate world. As creator and host of *TIE Unearthed Podcast* and host of London's Evening with TIE events, Ms. White is also a distinguished speaker and a prolific author. She has published over 60 articles as well as the book *Return on Humanity: Leadership Lessons from All Corners of the World*. Ms. White mentors and advises companies eager to embrace a more human-centered approach to business, leveraging her extensive experience and the transformative nature of her work. Born in South Africa and raised in Canada, she relocated to the UK after participating in a business exchange program in Thailand and now resides in Brazil. Ms. White earned an honors in business administration degree from Ivey Business School, Western University, Canada. She can be reached at philippa@tieleadership.com.



CONTAGIOUS PURPOSE:

HOW VULNERABILITY
& DIVERSITY
CHALLENGE ABLEISM

Author

Anica Zeyen

Sixteen percent of the world's population (1.3 billion people) are disabled.¹ Disabled people are twice as likely to live in poverty than nondisabled people. In fact, a recent report by the United Nations (UN) showed that disabled people face an average of 20 percentage points difference in multidimensional poverty and employment.² For some disabilities, employment rates are in single or low two-digit figures.³ Access to education remains severely restricted, if not entirely absent, in many regions. Many workplaces, recreational areas, and government buildings are inaccessible, and information is often not available in formats that disabled individuals can use. Stigma and prejudice are rampant.

A look at the latest UN report on disability and sustainable development doesn't paint a better picture. Thirty percent of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) linked to disability aren't on track, and 14% have worsened and won't be met unless progress accelerates by two to 65 times, depending on the indicator.⁴

Alongside the rest of the disability community, I, as a blind professor, often wonder about this. We are roughly one in five people: why are we still so invisible? The statistics alone should spur urgent action. Most corporate equality, diversity, and inclusion programs have not fully (and, frankly, often hardly) woken up to the full spectrum of disability.

How is it that many products and services remain inaccessible to disabled customers?⁵ Why must we meticulously plan to find accessible restaurants or travel companies so we know we can enjoy our time and not get refused, discriminated against, or have our mobility equipment broken? Why do we face daily microaggressions at work and in public, often leading to isolated lives? And why is it deemed okay for employers, businesses, and the public to question and even dispute someone's disability status or ask deeply personal questions about medical conditions or a stranger's sex life?

The marketplace is disabling for my community.⁶ It's 2024: why is ableism (discrimination of people based on differences in minds and bodies) still a thing?⁷ How can ableism be tackled to create a world where disabled people experience inclusion? How can we inspire people to see this as their purpose? How can purpose help?

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DISABILITY**

This article argues that vulnerability can act as a key catalyst for positive contagion, bringing individuals' purpose to the forefront and motivating others to embrace vulnerability and drive change.

WHAT IS DISABILITY?

The problem starts with the word "disability." Many people avoid using this word in favor of words such as "differently abled," "special needs," "people of dedication," and even "superheroes." This is a problem because not using the word disability implies that it is a bad word, something to be ashamed of and only whispered about in dark corners. People's negative perception of the word speaks to negative societal views on disability.

In truth, disability is not a bad word. It's not a bad thing, either. Disability is a word that describes a situation and something many feel pride about.



Disability isn't a monolithic concept. Traditionally, the medical model of disability has dominated: disability is a deviation from an arbitrarily defined "normal" body or mind. According to this view, disability is something to be fixed, aiming to make the disabled body as close to an able-bodied one as possible.

The disability rights movement has championed a different perspective: the social model of disability. This model argues that disability arises not from an individual's physical or mental differences but from societal barriers, be they physical, virtual, or relational. For instance, if all information were available in screen-reader-accessible formats, if wayfinding systems were prevalent, and if public transportation announced stops, a blind person like me would be far less disabled. The issue lies not in our bodies, but in a world that is not designed for us.

Other models highlight the psycho-emotional work of disabled people to deal with daily challenges and their struggles to gain human rights. Even more so, the affirmative model of disability celebrates our diversity in minds, bodies, and bodyminds and embraces disability pride.⁸

Most people and businesses view disability through the lens of the medical model. This perspective contributes to 1.3 billion people being overlooked or hushed rather than celebrated as part of the rich diversity of humanity. It also explains the ongoing debate and frequent censoring and policing of disabled people when they refer to themselves as disabled. Many disabled people are regularly told: "Don't use that word; you're not disabled."

Many disabled people deliberately choose identity-first language to indicate their alignment with the social model of disability (that the world they live in isn't designed for them). They don't refer to other people as "able-bodied." Instead, they use the term "nondisabled" or, more recently, "not-yet-disabled," acknowledging that many people will experience disability with age.

I would never dictate how anyone should refer to themselves nor should nondisabled people and businesses. For this article, I use the term "disabled people" to align with the social model. However, I recognize that others within the community prefer "person with a disability."

Understanding that disability means different things to different people is as crucial as respecting their choice of identity-first or person-first language. These terms carry significant meaning — more than many nondisabled people realize.

DISABILITY & THE PANDEMIC

My research journey began in a field far removed from disability; I was a social entrepreneurship scholar. In 2017, I began volunteering in disability organizations and switched my research focus to disability a year later. I found my purpose in it. I experienced (and still do) ample ableism. For example, I was told at the age of 11 to give up plans of attending university or having a meaningful career. Today, I engage in unpaid and paid work that gives me purpose.

This purpose became even clearer at the start of the pandemic. Reading social media posts and reports from disabled journalists about what was happening to disabled people shook me to the core. I read reports about do-not-resuscitate orders being signed on behalf of disabled people, guide dogs being kicked and hit by members of the public (because of fears they transmitted the virus), and disabled people being unable to access care, food, and other basic needs. This was happening while nondisabled people talked about how they finally understood what being disabled was like. They didn't. This told me I needed to do even more. I needed to find a way to create a platform to amplify others' voices and bring these stories to nondisabled people. I needed allies who shared the purpose of disability inclusion.

My work started with a research project funded by the British Academy as part of a special research grant scheme. Between August 2020 and September 2022, Oana Branzei from the Ivey Business School in Canada and I followed 24 disabled workers in the UK. Our participants represented diversity regarding their disability, gender identity, race/ethnicity, LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and others) identity, relationship status, educational background, and/or whether they were employed or self-employed/entrepreneurs.

For two years, they wrote, spoke, or drew diaries for us, and we regularly talked to them over Zoom. We captured their experiences of starting new jobs, being made redundant, being furloughed, starting or quitting a part-time degree, breaking off long-term relationships, processing grief, experiencing suicidal episodes, comforting colleagues, and being afraid/anxious/joyful/excited. It was one of the most eye-opening and emotionally engaging research projects I have ever conducted. Being able to share (to a degree) the lives of 24 strangers taught me much about disability and ableism.

The most striking thing was the efforts our participants undertook to make meaning.⁹ For example, Herbie talked about how his colleagues called him a robot because of his autism, and Annemarie had to send out 1,000 applications to get an entry-level job, even though she had been an executive before she became disabled. Like many other disabled individuals, she is overqualified for the job she managed to secure. Pink talked about how her nondisabled colleagues leaned on her for comfort because she knew what it was like to live in a world not designed for her. In fact, many of our participants engaged in this type of emotional labor — there is a great deal of unseen work disabled people do to “fit” in a nondisabled world.¹⁰

VULNERABILITY LESSONS

Vulnerability came through clearly in the study and others I've conducted since. It's present in social media creators and public speeches. Notably, our participants weren't just vulnerable with me; they behaved similarly with others in the workplace, at industry events, and through their social media activity. They came to recognize the impact this has on others, and many used their vulnerability to find their purpose. This intrigued me.

Recent research centers on the role of compassion in social entrepreneurship.¹¹ This work showcases how events in a social entrepreneur's life shaped their decision to engage in activities to create a better future for others in a similar situation. In my work with disabled people, compassion plays a big role, but vulnerability plays a bigger one.

The crucial difference is that vulnerability for disabled people isn't a periodic experience; it's a part of life. What I'm referring to is not voluntary vulnerability (where someone chooses to be vulnerable) but situations where people are made vulnerable and even made to share vulnerability. It's both choice and coercion — sometimes not even distinguishable in the moment of experienced or shared vulnerability.

4 TRUTHS

What can we learn from disability, vulnerability, and purpose? Much, but the four points below are essential:

1. **Disability is too hidden.** It is frequently the missing feature in diversity considerations, product and service design, workplace organization, process and operations management, and other parts of business. Disability needs to be made visible. Companies that fail to accommodate and embrace the disability community miss out on a vast talent pool and a significant customer base. It's time businesses woke up to this reality and took meaningful steps toward genuine inclusivity. The future of work and society depends on it.
2. **Disabled or not yet, vulnerability allows us to delve deep within ourselves to discover our "true" purpose.** This doesn't need to be connected to potentially traumatic experiences, but it will likely relate to something we feel strongly about. Without vulnerability, we cannot find what that is.
3. **Vulnerability is not about fishing for praise or pity, it is about being open about the ups and downs of life.** It thus requires authenticity from those sharing their vulnerability as part of their own purpose, supporting others in finding purpose, and receiving vulnerability. Change can't happen if the recipients of vulnerability simply respond with pity or praise; they must reflect and link these to their own experiences and identify what their role could be in spreading positive change so that barriers are broken down and triumphs multiply.
4. **Vulnerability acts as a service to others, helping them tap into their purpose if they haven't yet discovered or fully embraced it.** Leaders can promote and support positive attitudes toward disability and other topics by being vulnerable themselves and by creating environments that allow others to safely express their vulnerability. This aligns with the increasing discussions about safe zones or safe spaces. These spaces are less about avoiding conflict and more about establishing clear rules that govern conversations. In these spaces, people can openly express their feelings and thoughts with the knowledge that the other people in the "room" have the tools they need to explain why they object to, feel uncomfortable about, or are offended by certain statements.

WHEN PURPOSE BECOMES CONTAGIOUS

For an inclusive world to become a reality, these four lessons must spread. But how can companies tap into vulnerability if they don't have any disabled staff or people who are comfortable being openly vulnerable due to a lack of perceived safety?

I believe the idea of positive contagion can help us with this. From consumer research, I borrowed the idea that behaviors, products, and services linked to something perceived as positive can spread like viruses.¹² Several studies have showcased the positive contagion effect within leadership in global companies or looked at the role of hopeful leaders in their organization's success.^{13,14}

This led me to consider how the positive contagion effect could be created without personal interactions. This is crucial to supporting organizations that have no or only a few disabled staff, to reduce the burden of educating nondisabled people about disabled people, and to create widespread change toward urgently needed disability inclusion.

I decided to create a documentary that featured forms of vulnerability in an accessible way. I co-directed it with filmmaker WadeBE (see Figure 1). It features six disabled UK women of varied racial, economic, and class backgrounds with different sexual orientations, family situations, and ages. Each came forward willing to be vulnerable in front of strangers and cameras. Each has invisible disabilities, sometimes in addition to visible disabilities. The 26-minute documentary is called *Invisible*, not only because the protagonists have invisible disabilities, but because their experiences and identities often went unnoticed.¹⁵

The six women (Avril, Hannah, Jahnavi, Jessica, Kelly, and Lucy) share their experiences during the pandemic and beyond. They open up about their struggles, their triumphs, and a great deal more. Their stories are deeply personal and emotional. They are also sometimes painful or full of pride, joy, and hope. (Their full interviews are available on YouTube.¹⁶)

Their purpose comes across most poignantly when asked why they chose to take this step into high visibility. Jessica says: "I wanted to do this so that anyone who wonders if they are alone, feels less alone." She continues: "I don't know how to describe it. If I would have been able to see, or experience really what a potential future may look like, I would've felt more able to dream for a future of myself." Her purpose is to ensure that other disabled Black LGBTQ+ people don't feel the same hopelessness regarding their future. She talks about how homophobia, racism, and ableism were (and sometimes still are) her companions. She also wants everyone to know that she has a job she likes, is finally learning how to play the piano, and is happy with her wife, Hannah. She did not think such a life was possible.

She is not alone. Kelly was diagnosed with autism and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder in her mid-20s. She is passionate about human rights, especially for disabled women, and managed to land her dream job: an internship with the UN in New York. She was the runner-up in a Channel 4 UK reality TV show called "Make Me Prime Minister," where she again chose to be vulnerable by allowing the crew to film her autistic meltdowns. Kelly found relief in her diagnosis: it helped her understand herself, find her purpose, and no longer live in her car.



Figure 1. Poster for documentary film *Invisible*

Avril had to leave her political party due to harassment. She struggles to pay for her household expenses but is constantly fundraising on behalf of others. She advocates for those marginalized in her community while balancing regular medical appointments for her epilepsy and other conditions.

Hannah spent multiple years in a hospital bed. She is now an electric wheelchair user with chronic pain and energy-limiting conditions. In the film, she proudly shares that she got her first job at the age of 30, something she thought would never happen. She devotes the limited energy she has to her job as an accountant and to blogging about her experiences as a way to advocate for more accessibility.

Lucy faces severe mental health challenges, including bipolar disorder. She openly discusses these issues, not only in our documentary but in a newsletter to her entire organization, where she talks about depression, severe anxiety, and her daily life beyond the pandemic. Similarly, Jahnavi experienced a combination of racism and ableism and used the pandemic as an opportunity to publish her first book.

For some of these women, disability played no role. For others, their disability and its invisibility made their challenges and subsequent triumphs much greater. All of them share their pride in persevering, in “still being here,” and in their deep purpose: ensuring that the world they leave behind

We screened *Invisible* for the first time right before the International Day of Disabled Persons (which is on 3 December). Part of the audience was in tears. While filming, my crew and I often sat in rapt silence, hardly even daring to breathe.

Although I was amazed by all six women, I wanted to make sure the film focused on their vulnerability. It was important not to turn it into what disability activist Stella Young calls “inspiration porn.” She uses this term to label depictions of disabled people in which they get praised and put on pedestals for simply existing or for activities that wouldn’t lead to praise if a nondisabled person did it (e.g., people being amazed that I can cook and that I do it without chopping off my fingers).¹⁷

I felt it was important to show that their disability brings these women joy and pride just as much as it brings them anxiety and struggles. Not everything in their lives is good or bad because of their disability; sometimes, disability is just the backdrop against which their lives occur. More importantly, I wanted to lift the invisibility cloak off these moments of dark and light. These women are extraordinary not because they are disabled, but because they showcase why vulnerability is nothing to be ashamed of — rather, it requires courage and is very powerful. They took something that others sometimes coerce them to do and made it their own, on their terms. To me, this is strength.

Invisible has been shown in university classrooms and companies around the globe. It has also been viewed by more than 1,000 people on YouTube. In anonymous surveys, viewers shared with us how the film reshaped their view of disability. Many told us they plan to go back into their workplaces and companies and ensure disability becomes a key consideration in decisions. Avril, Hannah, Jessica, Jahnavi, Kelly, and Lucy were willing to be vulnerable, and this vulnerability is spreading and creating change, just as though it were contagious.

It is time that 1.3 billion people become visible to all of us. Disability can teach us much about diversity within humanity, and it holds many lessons about purpose and vulnerability. It demonstrates that being vulnerable on one’s own terms can create change and spread like a positive contagion.

Of course, as with real viruses, this only works through exposure. It is on everyone to ensure that leaders, managers, colleagues, clients, and customers are exposed to disability (vulnerability) to help spread and create an inclusive world for all of us. Watch films like *Invisible*, engage disabled public speakers, watch disabled content creators, listen to members of your disabled staff employee networks (or facilitate the founding of one), and educate yourself.

Ensure disability is omnipresent in all decisions made. Listen to vulnerability, be vulnerable yourself, and work together as allies. Amidst all of this, never forget the disability movement slogan: “Nothing About Us Without Us.” Include us — don’t be part of making us invisible.

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THE PURPOSE- IN-PRACTICE COMMUNITY: BANG, NOT FIZZ!



Authors

Dee Corrigan, Lauren Elliott, Gethin Hine,
and James McCarthy

Commitment to purpose-led business is growing; so, too, is skepticism of the intent and efficacy of organizations to transform their business models to profitably serve people and the planet. Part of this critique is the perceived nebulosity around what “purpose-driven” means in practice — particularly in challenging contexts.

This is the way the world ends. Not with a bang but a whimper.

— T.S. Eliot, *The Hollow Men*

Those who are committed to transitioning business ecosystems toward greater health are torn between feeling a need to create (and perhaps impose) more clarity to preserve the legitimacy of the movement and the recognition that this change might necessitate a more nuanced, evolving approach, anchored in a shared understanding of what it means to be a purpose-driven business.

Without this shared understanding, we often see purpose being introduced into an organization with an initial “bang” that promises to provide much-needed direction for the business and bring a sense of meaning to the stakeholders involved but “fizzles” away quietly as the organization returns to business as usual (traditional, profit-centric practices).¹

In the modern landscape, being purpose-driven is no longer a peripheral concept but is recognized as a critical driver of organizational success. The challenge for business leaders and purpose practitioners is clear: ensure your purpose doesn’t end with a whimper but rather invigorates and propels your organization forward. This article draws on the findings of the Purpose-in-Practice Community, which explores more favorable conditions for transformative change and a lasting impact.²

BEING PURPOSE-DRIVEN IS NO LONGER A PERIPHERAL CONCEPT BUT IS RECOGNIZED AS A CRITICAL DRIVER

THE BANG-FIZZ DILEMMA

The bang-fizz dilemma describes a common trajectory observed by our community when their organizations attempt to embed purpose. The *bang* is an enthusiastic launch of purpose characterized by high energy, grand statements, and ambitious plans. This phase often involves leaders passionately advocating for the new direction, employees showing high levels of engagement, and stakeholders expressing optimism about the future. In time, the initial enthusiasm *fizzles* out. This phase is marked by waning interest, decreased engagement, and a gradual return to conventional practices focused on short-term gains.

A reason for the bang-fizz is a lack of a deeply embedded, shared understanding of what it means to be purpose-driven. Without this foundation, purpose remains a superficial or theoretical concept, easily overshadowed by short-term goals and operational pressures.

The community’s inquiries focus on the practices and approaches of creating a shared understanding, rather than an exploration of the definition of purpose-driven business (such definitions and frameworks already exist). We need more effective approaches to creating and sustaining a shared understanding and commitment to purpose across an organization (and beyond). Leaders and practitioners must also develop their capacity to meet resistance and navigate challenges — shifting the emphasis from “what” to “how.”

Skepticism grows as people within organizations become tentative toward (or unknowingly ignore) the presence of purpose-driven efforts within the business. The fizz can be attributed to several factors:

- **Superficial commitment.** Initial commitment to purpose is often superficial, driven by external pressures rather than genuine internal motivation. Organizations may adopt purpose-driven rhetoric to align with market trends or appease stakeholders, without fully integrating it into their core operations.
- **Lack of sustained effort.** Maintaining a purpose-driven approach requires continuous

effort, resources, and dedication. Many organizations underestimate the level of commitment needed to sustain purpose over the long term.

- **Misalignment of purpose and strategy.** Purpose must be seamlessly integrated into an organization’s strategy, operations, and culture. Misalignment between purpose and business practices leads to disillusionment and disengagement among employees.
- **Insufficient stakeholder engagement.** For purpose to thrive, it must resonate with all stakeholders, including employees, customers, suppliers, and the broader community. Inadequate stakeholder engagement undermines the collective commitment to purpose.

HOW TO CULTIVATE PURPOSE

One should consider the opposite end of the spectrum: how your work deepens and sustains and how developing shared understanding requires you to move toward that rather than simply avoiding the fizz. By acknowledging and understanding the nature of the bang-fizz phenomenon, one can reflect on the behaviors that prevent purpose from having a meaningful effect on organizations.

Figure 1 illustrates how companies that deliberately cultivate the conditions on the right of the diagram could be better positioned to deepen and sustain a shared understanding of purpose over time. The conditions illustrated on the left



Figure 1. The “bang-fizz” to “deepen & sustain” model (source: The Purpose-in-Practice Community)

— though some are necessary to create the energy and mandate for purpose (e.g., leadership commitment, passionate experts, well-articulated purpose statements) — are not sufficient to sustain it in the long term and contribute to the bang-fizz phenomenon.

Through this lens, the necessary shifts in behaviors and approaches to work are visible. Raising the level of understanding and commitment to purpose in an organization is a continuous endeavor. It's complex, adaptive, and typically asks us to work at a level that is deeper and more personally meaningful and challenging than habitual ways of working.

The cumulative effect of falling into two or more of the habitual traps on the left side can create a perfect storm where purpose, once thought to be a bright guiding star, loses its shine. Accepting the need to find new ways to avoid the fizz and deepen and sustain efforts (ways that cut across hierarchy and the “normal way things are done around here”), the model explores more favorable conditions for more effective and lasting change.

MOVE FROM FOCUSING ON WORDS TO FOCUSING ON INTENT

“Finally! We have arrived at the perfectly crafted purpose statement that describes our reason for being. Now let's tell people, plaster it on the walls, shout it from the pulpit!”

Sound familiar? The purpose statement and narrative are hugely important. But, for most businesses to transform into a force for good, a statement of words and communications is insufficient. Without exploring and discussing the intent and deep shifts in underlying beliefs and assumptions about how an organization creates value for its stakeholders and society, the purpose statement will be ineffectual.

Limiting assumptions and tacit beliefs that hold a powerful grip on individuals restrict what is viewed as possible to change. For many businesses, the intent to become purpose-driven is a fundamental shift in the beliefs and assumptions that underpin how an organization creates value for all its stakeholders and society. This often goes unacknowledged.

Focusing on intent invites us to leverage the power of generative dialogue and collective sensemaking. Why? Because orienting toward the needs of people and the planet is not a task or communication challenge — it's a value system, a way of being. For action to be authentic and sustained, the intent must be meaningful. How you make meaning is a personal process — one that happens in relationship to past and current experiences and to others.

MOVE FROM FOCUSING ON ME TO FOCUSING ON US

A business might have a visionary CEO who is passionate about being purpose-driven. But one person's passion can inadvertently stop others from developing their own desires, beliefs, and commitments. This risks purpose compliance: people going along with it but without developing their own desire or belief about what it means to be purpose-driven.

This may work for a time — when the business is prospering and stakeholders are happy. But what happens when context shifts, difficult trade-offs have to be navigated, challenges emerge, or the CEO leaves? It is absolutely necessary to have a CEO who is leading with purpose, but purpose-driven organizations are not a result of top-down compliance; they are co-created.

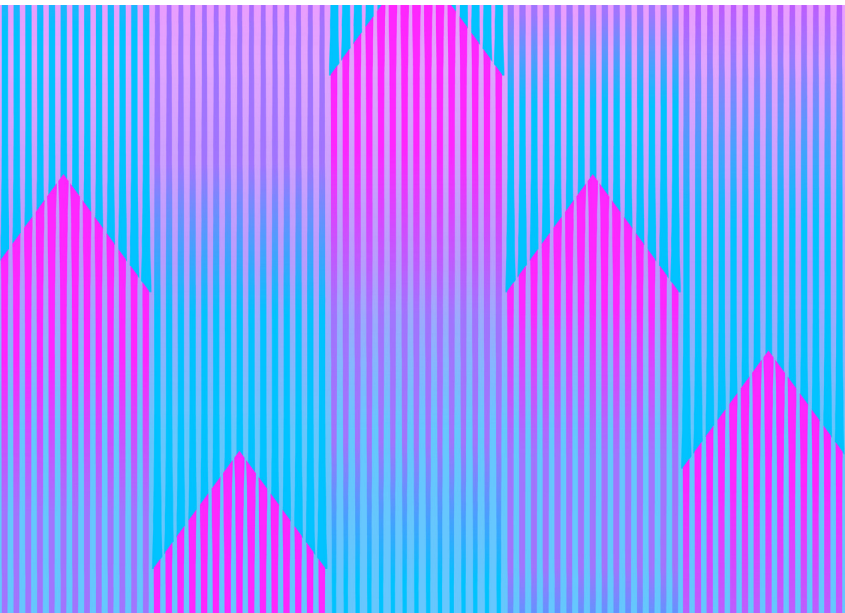
A purpose-driven business creates value by serving society; competitive advantage and profit are outcomes of doing that well. In developing people's understanding of what it means to be a purpose-driven business, it's important to create space to lift people out of the day-to-day, raising the ambition of what their collective intelligence, influence, and experience could be in service of.

This level of aspiration can't be driven by the CEO or the communications department; people must be active participants, having a closer connection to, and understanding of, the needs of their stakeholders. Bringing their whole selves as “citizens” helps elevate people's aspirations (beyond “workers”), deepening and sustaining their understanding of their business purpose.

MOVE FROM DEFERRING UP TO DEFERRING OUT

Equipped with a purpose statement and led by passion, a charismatic leader or CEO can unconsciously create the conditions for hero leadership, driving dependency throughout the organization and unnecessarily reserving decisions to the hierarchy. People become passive consumers of the purpose rather than active participants in it. This limits the potential of both the purpose and people.

To create goods that are truly “good,” and services that truly “serve,” you must understand the lived experience and needs of your stakeholders. A useful starting point is to look outward rather than upward. By encouraging employees to connect with the various roles they and their colleagues hold (e.g., being customers, community members, guardians of future generations, or investors), they are better able to explore a business dilemma or decision.



By looking outward, while paying attention to their colleagues’ perspectives, employees engage with the complexity of purpose-driven decision-making, rather than deferring upward to leaders and seeking simple solutions. This motivates people to make purpose-driven decisions and actively shape their work for the better alongside others, fostering innovation, creativity, and a sense of shared responsibility and agency.

MOVE FROM APATHY TO CURIOSITY

If people feel their perspectives are not valued, their concerns are not being heard, or they can’t contribute their ideas, they start to complain and sink into apathy. Out of fear of losing momentum, you can fall into the trap of trying harder to convince people of the power of purpose, further suppressing people’s concerns and views.

For people to explore what purpose means for them and their organization, they must believe their perspective is heard and valued. Openly exploring a variety of perspectives on the role of business in society can be uncomfortable and takes time, but in the long run, it cultivates a greater commitment to what it means to be a purpose-driven business.

When creating a shared understanding of purpose, never aim for bland uniformity. Instead, seek healthy, robust dialogue, recognizing that the best collective efforts emerge from environments that welcome challenge and hold a range of perspectives in creative tension. When divergent views are openly acknowledged rather than suppressed, tension can be harnessed to co-create meaning, active engagement, and breakthrough ideas. In addition, tuning into people who at first seem cynical can offer insights into the hard and messy work.

MOVE FROM SILOING TO CONNECTING EXPERTISE

Purpose can be kept alight by a passionate few in sustainability, corporate social responsibility, or HR teams that take on the weight of responsibility for driving change. By positioning themselves as experts, they reinforce the notion that others are passive consumers of purpose and not active participants.

Creating a shared understanding and commitment to becoming purpose-driven among leadership is important and necessary, but it is not sufficient. Change does not happen in a linear, top-down fashion; it evolves through formal and informal networks in an organization. Relationships with, and connections between, people are as important as formal hierarchical organizational structures in helping drive change.

People with high intrinsic motivation and a desire to create change are often referred to as “catalysts.” Identifying and connecting people who value different perspectives, tolerate ambiguity and uncertainty, are resilient to setbacks, and are willing to listen and voice uncomfortable views can accelerate the journey to purpose.

MOVE FROM ABSTRACT CONCEPTS TO CONCRETE REALITIES

When a passionate few take on the mantle of purpose in their organization, they will never have the depth and breadth of understanding to create relevancy for people in diverse roles. Thus, the understanding of purpose remains conceptual and detached from most people’s daily reality.

Being overly conceptual or theoretical can result in the perception that purpose is too abstract and general to change behaviors. For purpose to be relevant to people’s daily roles, they must be able to translate the concept into daily action. Understanding deepens and commitment to change builds only through actively experimenting and experiencing firsthand the impact of purpose.

PERSONAL QUALITIES TO CULTIVATE

Dialogue and exploration help individuals recognize how conditioned some of us have become to behave in certain ways. Our group of leaders and practitioners have outlined six qualities of purpose drivers:

1. **Ensure your commitment is genuine** and sustained by tapping into your inner drive.
2. **Appreciate diverse perspectives** to enrich dialogue and achieve more comprehensive solutions.
3. **Embrace the unknown** to navigate the complexities and challenges inherent in purpose-driven work.
4. **Turn setbacks into valuable learning experiences** to foster growth and adaptation.
5. **Be flexible and responsive** to evolving situations.
6. **Foster collaboration and empower others**, building a collective sense of ownership and purpose.

AVOID PURPOSE TRAPS

Human behavior within an organization can also hinder purpose. The community warns of nine traps to avoid on the journey to shared understanding and purpose:

1. **Chasing achievement.** This involves viewing shared understanding as an end state that one achieves, as opposed to an ongoing process you are in a relationship with. Creating shared understanding is a practice that is progress in and of itself.
2. **Seeking perfection.** This involves seeking a frictionless end state and rigidly working toward that fixed outcome, instead of sensing and facilitating the best next step. We must instead accept that no state is truly tension-free and that to approach this work with such an assumption prevents us from enjoying the present moment and leads to frustration.
3. **Jumping to action.** Don’t be concerned about spending too much time talking about purpose. We must understand that dialogue, continuous sensemaking, and generative conversation are part and parcel of the driving of purpose because they create shared understanding, helping to reinforce our commitment and ensuring consistent action.
4. **Reinforcing hierarchies.** Assuming that the power to change is outside oneself, that someone up the organizational ladder sees and sets purpose, distracts from the importance of taking seriously one’s own discovery.
5. **Overworking.** Jumping from one idea/solution to the next, anxiety, and busyness are warning signs we have strayed away from purpose. Space to reflect is needed to find the way back to purpose.
6. **Assuming we can control change.** People find comfort in project plans and communications efforts. However, it’s good to lean into the discomfort of challenging beliefs, assumptions, and mental models and instead move toward relationship-focused ways of driving change.
7. **Polarizing.** Some people tend to reinforce polarized positions by seeking out “believers” and making others feel they are wrong. It is better to assume that everyone’s intentions are good and look for ways to bridge the gap.

- 8. **Taking on too much responsibility.** Some of us can take on too much of the burden of change instead of sharing the responsibility. There is value in driving purpose with and alongside others.
- 9. **Positioning ourselves as experts.** Most people feel the need to know the answers, but the journey to purpose neither requires nor rewards individual expertise.

Table 1 links the personal qualities that enable reaching the organizational practices that help build a shared understanding.

OVERCOMING THE BANG-FIZZ DILEMMA

Purpose-driven organizations are not only better positioned to navigate the complexities of the modern business landscape, they also make a positive impact on society and the environment. The importance of purpose will continue to grow, and organizations that successfully sustain their purpose-driven efforts will be the ones that thrive and lead the way toward a more sustainable and equitable future.³

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PERSONAL QUALITIES	ORGANIZATIONAL PRACTICES
Connect to intrinsic motivation	Anchor to intent
Value difference	Elevate the inquiry
Lean into fear and uncertainty	Widen your lens
Learn from failure	Lean into tensions
Embrace emergence	Connect catalysts
Let go of individual control	Co-create relevancy

Table 1. Successful personal qualities and organizational practices for building a shared understanding (source: The Purpose-in-Practice Community)

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FROM PROFIT TO PURPOSE:

ARCHITECTING THE PURPOSE ECONOMY

Author

Coro Strandberg

The single-minded drive for profits in modern shareholder capitalism exacts a heavy toll on society. Accelerating climate change, mounting biodiversity loss, widening inequality, and eroding public trust are among the most damaging consequences of this economic paradigm. Its focus on profit as the primary purpose of business is a threat to human and planetary well-being.

As business educators know, this singular profit focus is a mainstay in business schools and is reinforced by political and financial systems, the leaders of which were also taught the profit-first paradigm. Nevertheless, it can be reversed. The economy can be rebuilt to foster long-term well-being for people and the planet. And fortunately, this transformation is underway.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE ECONOMY & HOW DID IT START?

Accelerated by the global pandemic, leading companies are challenging the orthodoxy that a business exists solely to create profit and instead define a business purpose to create a better world. These businesses are bringing the purpose economy to life.

There is no universal definition of a “social purpose” business, but most describe it as a business that improves society:

- A social purpose business is a company whose reason for being is to create a better world.¹
- Its purpose is to profitably solve the problems of people and the planet and not profit from creating problems.²
- It is the company’s optimal strategic contribution to long-term well-being for all people and planet.³

Not all discussants use the language of “social” purpose. Indeed, the International Standards Organization (ISO) guideline for the governance of organizations defines the *purpose* of an organization as its “meaningful reason to exist.”⁴

Regardless of terminology, a business that defines its purpose as improving societal conditions (whether social, environmental, or both) channels its enterprise capabilities, talents, resources, partnerships, and influence toward its purpose. The purpose becomes the company’s North Star, guiding it through turbulent times and mobilizing employees and stakeholders around it.

These businesses differentiate their purpose from their vision (where the company is headed in pursuit of its purpose) and their mission (which is what the company does to realize its purpose every day). They also differentiate their purpose from their environmental, social, and governance (ESG) or sustainability objectives, which is how the company identifies and manages its material social and environmental risks and opportunities. A social purpose company continues these sustainability efforts, but it also directs its business toward fulfilling the higher purpose it has identified for itself.

**A SOCIAL PURPOSE
BUSINESS IS A
COMPANY WHOSE
REASON FOR BEING
IS TO CREATE A
BETTER WORLD**

These businesses seek to transform the ecosystems in which they operate to realize their purpose and bring all their assets and roles in pursuit of it. Whether it's reducing income inequality, accelerating the low-carbon economy, or improving public health, this becomes the ongoing quest that is built into the company's governance, culture, operations, and relationships.

This is also a global movement. Table 1 provides examples of social purpose company statements from different economies.

SOCIAL PURPOSE BUSINESSES IS A GLOBAL MOVEMENT

Two significant global developments spurred this rethinking of corporate purpose. First, in 2018, Larry Fink, CEO of BlackRock, the world's largest asset manager, declared in his CEO letter that "society is demanding that companies, both public and private, serve a social purpose" and argued that companies need a social purpose to achieve their full potential.⁵ Second, in 2019, the Business Roundtable, representing nearly 200 CEOs of America's largest corporations, overturned its 1987 policy statement that defined a corporation's principal purpose as maximizing shareholder return. It adopted a new "Statement on the Purpose of the Corporation": to promote an economy that serves all Americans.⁶ These events marked a watershed moment, shifting the conversation toward the idea that the purpose of business goes beyond profit to creating a better world.

Why might these venerable institutions argue for a pivot to purpose? For one thing, they recognize the business imperative of having an overarching quest to improve society. Research reveals that

purpose-centered companies outperform peers in customer loyalty, employee engagement, and financial success, realizing up to 175% growth in brand value and significant revenue increases.⁷

These developments gave the purpose economy its start: business leaders adopting a social purpose for their business, investors calling for businesses to adopt a social purpose, and business institutions redefining the purpose of corporations from one of financial value creation to stakeholder value creation.

Today, the purpose economy is being accelerated by purpose economy ecosystem builders that are helping social purpose companies start, transition, thrive, and grow. For example, the purpose of the Canadian Purpose Economy Project (CPEP) is to accelerate Canada's transition to the purpose economy. It does this by engaging national ecosystem actors to create an environment in which social purpose is mainstream. In this economy, businesses unlock their assets, influence, reach, and scale in collaboration with others to help Canada address its societal challenges and realize a flourishing future.

CPEP was born in the wake of the inaugural national dialogue on social purpose business in Canada in 2021, as detailed in "Propelling the Canadian Purpose Economy: A Framework for Action"⁸ (proceedings of the *Propelling Purpose Summit*). The summit was convened by a provincial initiative of United Way British Columbia Social Purpose Institute, established in 2016 to catalyze the social purpose business movement in British Columbia. It was the culmination of two years of consultation across Canada on how to accelerate purpose in business and created a blueprint for national action on social purpose business. It convened more than 300 influencers, thought leaders,

COMPANY	PURPOSE	REGION
Cochlear	To help people hear and be heard	Asia-Pacific
EY	To build a better working world	North America
LEGO	To inspire and develop the builders of tomorrow	Europe
Sleep Country	To transform lives by awakening Canadians to the power of sleep	North America
Olam	To reimagine global agriculture and food systems	Asia-Pacific
Unilever	To make sustainable living commonplace	Europe

Table 1. Social purpose company statement examples

and social purpose business leaders to coalesce their ideas on jumpstarting a national purpose economy.

The summit defined the purpose economy as “an economy powered by the pursuit of long-term well-being for all in which business and regulatory and financial systems foster an equitable, flourishing, resilient future.”⁹ Organizers also created a purpose economy ecosystem map to identify, profile, and engage the nascent social purpose community of allies and champions.¹⁰



This research and consultation was leveraged by MaRS Discovery District in Toronto, which shortly thereafter identified critical levers of change to catalyze social purpose business across Canada.¹¹ With funding from the federal government, and in collaboration with CPEP, MaRS conducted nearly 70 interviews with social purpose business ecosystem stakeholders representing these levers of change to understand their support for, and interest in, participating in the creation of the Canadian purpose economy.¹² These findings were adapted by CPEP, which officially launched in November 2022.

CPEP founders recognized that reimagining not only the purpose of business but also the purpose of the economy was an audacious goal. However, they realized that by leveraging key change mechanisms, they could begin transforming the economy toward the greater good. Since today’s economy is rooted in the original societal consensus around profit-centered models, it is equally feasible to harness the evolving social consensus that business should stand for more than profits.

The rest of this article describes the measures CPEP is taking to foster the adoption and execution of social purpose at scale in Canada, laying out a roadmap that other countries can replicate and adapt.

CREATING AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

CPEP is taking three steps to create an enabling environment to catalyze a social purpose business movement and architect a purpose economy:

1. Establish an intermediary organization to build the social purpose ecosystem.
2. Deploy the 10 purpose economy levers of change to create a business plan.
3. Mobilize business leaders and the social purpose community.

1. ESTABLISH AN INTERMEDIARY ORGANIZATION

CPEP launched with start-up capital from Coast Capital (a Canadian social purpose company with a business objective to play a role in advancing the purpose economy), a diverse steering committee of social purpose pioneers and ecosystem actors, and a website that curates social purpose resources to help businesses define, implement, and govern their social purpose.

Its vision is that by 2030, at least 25% of Canadian businesses will be adopting, disclosing, and authentically embedding a social purpose across their operations and relationships and collaborating with others to achieve it. CPEP chose that number in the belief that 25% will create a tipping point beyond which it will be normal for Canadian businesses to have a social purpose as their reason for being.

Its goal is for businesses to go beyond merely adopting a social purpose because that contributes to “purpose-washing” (a state where businesses have a stated social purpose but no genuine action on it). CPEP seeks authentic integration of the purpose, public disclosure of purpose progress, and collaboration with stakeholders to bring the purpose to life. CPEP is focused on an economy characterized by authenticity and impact.

2. DEPLOY THE 10 PURPOSE ECONOMY LEVERS OF CHANGE

CPEP embraced the 10 change levers identified in earlier research phases (see Figure 1) and set about inviting ecosystem actors to participate in action groups relevant to their area of expertise and influence. These groups are informal networks that aim to advance purpose within the change lever. Their terms of reference start with a theory of change: laying out how a specific lever can be deployed to increase the number of social purpose businesses and foster the creation of a social purpose business movement. They include goals, objectives, and actions for the action group to pursue, plus a mandate to create a Canadian model.

The following is a description of five of the levers (investor, board, accountant, association, business school), including their theory of change and a summary of key achievements to date.

INVESTOR LEVEL

Theory of change: Mobilizing institutional investors to engage the companies they invest in to adopt, govern, and implement a purpose will result in more companies adopting and implementing a purpose/social purpose as the reason they exist, helping tackle systemic challenges and risks. This changes the focus from shareholder primacy to stakeholder primacy.

Achievements:

- Created an as-yet-unpublished set of purpose investing due diligence questions that investors and fund managers can use to engage their portfolio companies and fund managers in discussions about the need to have a purpose and ensure that strategy, incentives, culture, and capital allocation are aligned to it. This will address investors' current lack of knowledge about the purpose of the companies they are financing and how the companies are executing their purpose.



Figure 1. 10 purpose economy levers of change (source: CPEP)

- Engaged four first-mover investors that are piloting various aspects of the due diligence questions in portfolio construction and stewardship activities.
- Identified the purpose of the companies on the TSX60, a stock market index of 60 large Canadian companies listed on the Toronto Stock Exchange, to help Canadian investors understand the purpose of some of their investments.

BOARD LEVER

Theory of change: Raising social purpose awareness of company directors and boards will result in more companies adopting and implementing a social purpose as the reason they exist. Once corporate boards are educated about social purpose, many will encourage their organizations to adopt a social purpose, and their boards will provide oversight to ensure it is implemented authentically.

Achievements:

- Published the “State of Purpose Governance in Canada” report, in partnership with five governance organizations that surveyed corporate directors and governance professionals on how Canadian boards are providing oversight on their corporate purpose.¹³
- Released the “Purpose Governance Guidelines for Boards,” adopted in principle by five first-mover governance organizations that are embedding them in their governance education, raising the bar for purpose governance in Canada.¹⁴
- Held first-ever national webinar on purpose governance, in collaboration with five governance organizations, which was attended by nearly 350 people.¹⁵

ACCOUNTANT LEVER

Theory of change: Accountants are uniquely qualified to create guidelines for how to account, report, and assure corporate purpose to demonstrate purpose accountability. This will ensure that purpose is implemented and reported authentically in Canada, fostering public trust and enabling investments in social purpose businesses.

Achievements:

- Published “Disclosing with Purpose: Guidance for Preparers and Users of Purpose Disclosures.”¹⁶ There are no global guidelines on purpose disclosures in existence, so this addresses a reporting gap in current standards and can help companies avoid purpose-washing and help investors understand how companies are enacting their purpose.
- Identified and supported four first-mover social purpose companies that are using the guidance to inform their public disclosures.
- Provided input into a global scan of purpose disclosure best practices to be published in the fall of 2024.

ASSOCIATION LEVER

Theory of change: Given that many associations serve businesses as members, they are a gateway to reaching businesses at scale to encourage them to adopt a social purpose. If associations adopt and implement a social purpose and encourage their members to do so, there will be accelerated take-up of social purpose business.

Achievements:

- Published “Accelerating Social Purpose Business Through Associations,” a case study of Family Enterprise Canada’s approach to engaging its family business members on social purpose.¹⁷ Family Enterprise Canada’s Impact Committee has adopted social purpose as a focus for member education; given that nearly two-thirds of Canadian businesses are family-owned, this represents a significant foray into the business community.
- Engaged three first-mover associations to hold social purpose education for their members.
- Supported British Columbia’s Chamber of Commerce in launching a social purpose educational series for its 36,000 business members, along with a province-wide survey to measure the number of businesses that have a social purpose as a baseline measure of the purpose economy in British Columbia. The survey is designed to be replicated by other provincial chambers of commerce to compile a statistical overview of social purpose business adoption in Canada.

BUSINESS SCHOOL LEVER

Theory of change: Business schools that incorporate social purpose business models into their core curriculum; experiential learning, continuing, executive, and professional education programs; and career preparation ensure graduates are equipped to bring this knowledge to their workplaces. This will change the short-term shareholder primacy focus to long-term purpose primacy and increase the number of social purpose businesses.

Achievements:

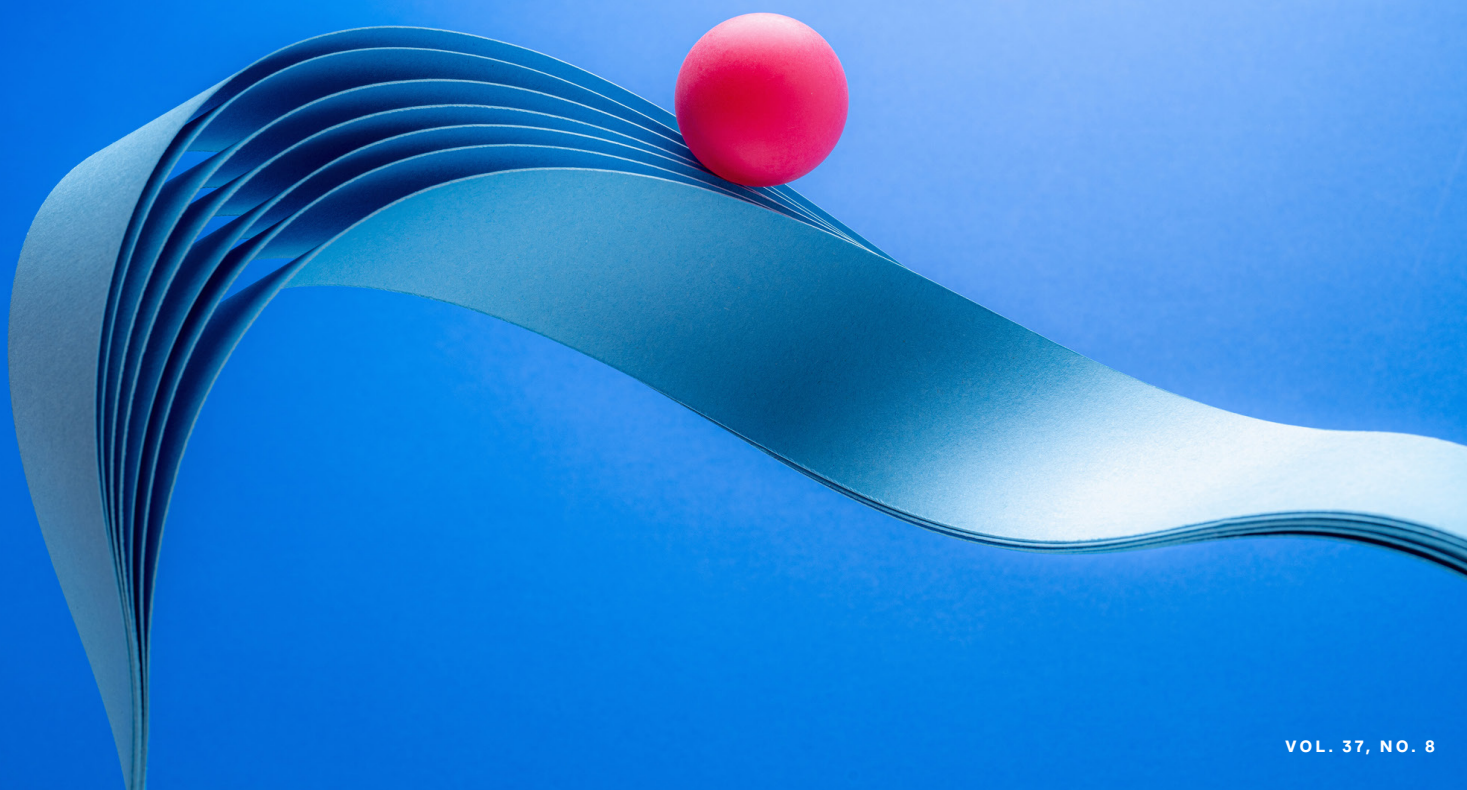
- Collaborated on a global scan of social purpose education in MBAs to identify schools where social purpose teaching is included in the core curriculum (detailed in the report “Social Purpose in Business Schools and MBA Curriculums”).¹⁸ It identified two schools with these practices and found that 20% of business schools have a social purpose themselves (seven are in Canada).
- Created the Social Purpose Business Curricula Framework showing how business schools can integrate social purpose business models into their core curricula across 15 mandatory courses.¹⁹

- Identified one first-mover Canadian business school interested in collaborating to embed social purpose in its MBA program.

Work continues on these and other levers, with a focus on identifying first movers, then second movers, and so on. The intent is to write up case studies of the first movers to build the field and grow the capacity of social purpose companies and ecosystem actors.

3. MOBILIZE BUSINESS LEADERS & THE SOCIAL PURPOSE COMMUNITY

The center of the 10 purpose economy levers of change model focuses on businesses and business leaders. To bring that to life, CPEP published “A Call to Purpose,” coauthored by six leading Canadian social purpose brands, appealing to their peers to join them in leading the way to the purpose economy.²⁰ So far, it has been signed by more than 100 CEOs of Canadian firms (or global firms with Canadian operations) and endorsed by more than 50 social purpose allies showing their support for the concept.



CPEP is also launching local purpose economy activation hubs in major markets across Canada, starting in the summer of 2024 in Vancouver. These hubs are designed to raise awareness of social purpose business, connect social purpose businesses and actors to one another, and foster champions of social purpose business.

Other tools to mobilize business leaders and the social purpose community include:

- “Your Toolkit to Help Grow the Purpose Economy,” a toolkit that social purpose businesses can use to help grow the purpose economy, for example by using their influence with their suppliers, business partners, business customers, or associations.²¹
- “The Social Purpose Professional,” a guide on how employees can act as social purpose professionals in their companies, whether or not their company has a social purpose.²² This can start the purpose wheel turning in their networks and within their firms.

A series of reports to help businesses understand how to define their social purpose and embed it across their operations, including:

- “Social Purpose Statement Criteria”²³
- “Social Purpose Strategy: Bring Your Corporate Purpose to Life”²⁴
- “Enhancing Risk Management Practices: A How-To Guide for Social Purpose Companies”²⁵

BARRIERS & NEXT STEPS TO ARCHITECTING THE PURPOSE ECONOMY

CPEP’s efforts have been met with enthusiasm from many quarters. However, it faces some headwinds.

BARRIERS

In addition to the usual challenge of finding financial support for a new initiative, the main barriers to architecting the purpose economy include mindsets and competing priorities:

- **Profit-first mindset.** There is an entrenched belief that the primary goal of business is to maximize profits. This mindset is deeply ingrained in business education and reinforced by political and financial systems.

- **Competing priorities.** Aligned people and organizations are typically fully committed to other priorities, and this results in slower adoption of purpose economy activation measures, despite their appeal.

These challenges are typical of social change efforts. In fact, they are the very challenges CPEP was set up to address.

NEXT STEPS

CPEP’s next steps will further pave the way for the adoption and expansion of social purpose in business to realize its vision of Canadian businesses adopting, disclosing, and authentically embedding a social purpose across their operations and relationships and collaborating with others to achieve it:

- **Purpose economy proof points.** Continuing efforts to activate the 10 levers of change by identifying, celebrating, and promoting first- and second-mover adoption of the models, tools, and frameworks and developing and communicating purpose economy proof points to foster believability.
- **Social purpose community.** Continuing to identify and engage social purpose allies and champions to amplify the social purpose message and hasten the purpose economy transformation.
- **Diversity and inclusion.** Investing in efforts to ensure the purpose economy centers and celebrates diversity and inclusion, through dialogue with diverse communities and ensuring no individual or organization is left behind in the purpose economy transition.
- **Purposeful governments.** Leveraging research on the role of governments at the local, provincial, and national levels to use their policy tools to drive social purpose in business and create collaborators on government’s social, economic, and environmental priorities.²⁶
- **Social purpose collaboration model.** Publishing research into the strategies that social purpose businesses are deploying to collaborate externally with stakeholders to execute on their purpose and drive impact (in collaboration with Royal Roads University).

- **Purpose economy partnerships.** Establishing partnerships with new social purpose ecosystem actors in Canada to foster economies of scale, build synergies, attract capital, and grow the purpose economy together.
- **Global cooperation.** Engaging with countries around the world that are at various stages of purpose economy activation, tapping into the rising demand to collaborate across borders to avoid duplication, foster replication, learn from each other, and scale globally.

CONCLUSION

These times call for a reimagining of the purpose of business. By following the strategies outlined in this article (identifying, consulting, and engaging the social purpose community; deploying purpose economy levers of change; and providing tools and resources for the business community and ecosystem actors), Canada and other nations can begin architecting the purpose economy. Although the task is daunting, it is not impossible. Every transformation starts with a first step.

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