Guest editors

**Oana Branzei
& Dusya Vera**

Contributing authors

Kanina Blanchard
Christian Busch
Luciana O. Cezarino
Frank Jan de Graaf
Alessandro Goulart
Vera Goulart
Murali Kuppuswamy
Lara Liboni

Sofiya Opatska
Vanessa M. Patrick
Rafael Petry
Matthew Phillips
Ananthi Al Ramiah
Gretchen Reydams-Schils
Andriy Rozhdestvensky
Gerard Seijts
Nele Terveen

CUTTER
AN ARTHUR D. LITTLE
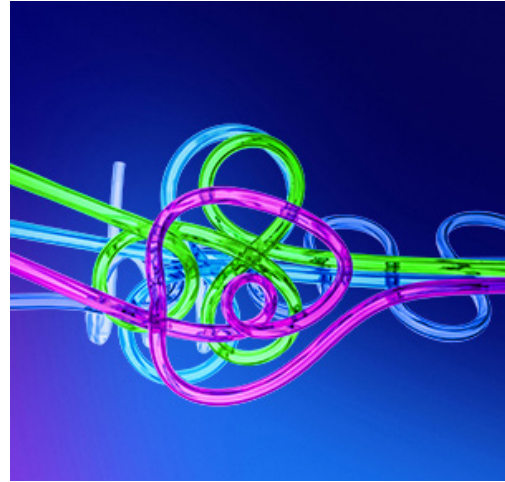COMMUNITY

AMPLIFY

Anticipate, Innovate, Transform

Scaffolding Purpose in Times of Polycrisis

CONTENT

SCAFFOLDING PURPOSE IN TIMES OF POLYCRISIS

BY OANA BRANZEI AND DUSYA VERA, GUEST EDITORS

Purpose and crises go together. Crises rekindle our attention to purpose and heighten our expectations of purpose-driven leaders. The global pandemic brought purpose so far up the strategic agenda that many leaders threw away their playbook and relied on purpose instead.

Because the need to make purpose profitable and profits purposeful remains at the top of the agenda in all sectors, there is an implicit assumption that purpose serves us especially well when times are tough. We often presume that crises toughen up leaders, that tough-ened leaders hold fast to purpose as times get tougher, and that purpose can be found, rather than lost, as adversity endures.

But when crises become so endemic and inter-twined that new words are needed to describe their confluence and consequence, purpose finds itself in crisis. Leaders who already have it must work harder and harder to hold onto it. Losing one's purpose is rarely talked about, even as many leaders risk being accused of "purpose washing" when their claims fail to yield the promised results. But how can leaders hold on to their purpose when circumstances are heart-wrenching or harrowing?

Starting from the premise that purpose is something we need and want, our first issue of this two-part *Amplify* series on scaffolding purpose likened purpose (as a noun) to property and explored *who* has it.[1] Here in our second installment, we focus on *how* leaders who already have purpose hold onto it when times get tough. We also examine how purpose can be actively reset in the midst of multiple crises. The seven articles in this issue bring to light counterintuitive aspects of purposing (as a verb).

THE PATH TO PURPOSE

This issue opens, perhaps counterintuitively, with advice against the myriad varieties of purpose washing many of us have experienced in organizations that claim to have purpose but do not always hold on to it. The path to purpose, we learn, must be paved with all sorts of formu-lations of the word "no" for leaders to hold fast to their purpose. We then delve further into the art of asking challenging questions, deliberating democratically, and cultivating virtues and character.

Staying on this path, turns out, is not easy. But it is worthwhile. Once we appreciate the impor-tance, and master the skill, of saying no to some of the factors that may distract us from purpose, we turn our attention to the power of unexpected (and sometimes undesired) occasions to rekindle it. Saying yes to hardship may seem as counterin-tuitive as saying no to opportunity.

Our last three articles dwell on the importance of steering right into the storm, especially when answers are unknown, solutions have not been validated, and victories have not been won. As they shift our attention from the everyday to the extraordinary, these three pieces move us into some of the least explored leadership grounds, where purpose is challenging to hold onto yet self-defining for those who manage it.

Each article contains practical perspectives, leveraging the pragmatic foundations underpinning much of today's management and education systems, but their value increases when read in (any) combination. They represent the perspectives of authors based in Brazil, Canada, Italy, Germany, the Netherlands, Ukraine, and the US, with disciplines ranging from classics, philosophy, and theology to education, policy, law, leadership, and business. This reminds us that the path to purpose is not linear; rather, it's repeatedly rediscovered as we take its power more and more seriously. The issue begins with the up close and personal but gradually lifts our concern up to systemic inequities and grand challenges, culminating with the extraordinary existential purpose marking 1,000 days of suffering, subsidiarity, and solidarity in Ukraine.

IN THIS ISSUE

In our first piece, Vanessa M. Patrick, author of *The Power of Saying No: The New Science of How to Say No That Puts You in Charge of Your Life*,[2] and Murali Kuppuswamy explain how saying no can be an essential antidote to purpose washing. Leveraging insights on empowered refusal, the authors suggest that by exemplifying no, leaders not only reaffirm their own purpose, they permit everyone else to uphold theirs. This positive feedback loop between exemplifying and permitting can also be read between the lines of the other six articles that follow. Before you rush on, ask yourself what example you set by your most recent no and who received permission to follow their own path to purpose as a result. Take note of how these two types of no (exemplifying and permitting) work for everyone around you: employees within your organization and the stakeholders watching for deviance from the company's stated purpose. This first piece reminds us that at the core of any type of "washing" lies our timidity in spotting and combating deviance from purpose. Purpose can only be washed, it turns out, when leaders like us don't say no when we ought to.

Next, Kanina Blanchard coaches leaders on how to recognize, resist, and redirect deviance from purpose. Her article reminds us that asking questions that matter is more an art than a science. It takes us behind the scenes, where vulnerability often makes otherwise brave leaders shy away (and sometimes stay away) from probing their everyday. Blanchard meets them there, offering the empathy and humility required to get at some of those important, if often unasked, questions: "Why not?"; "What if?"; "Where else?"; "How otherwise?" From the classroom to the boardroom, you may soon hear yourself embolden others to check in with their purpose so that they don't deviate too far from it.

Our third article, by Frank Jan de Graaf, invites us to try on deliberative practices. Firmly rooted in pragmatism, deliberation has historically played a significant (some say central) role in democratic societies. It also comes in handy when opposite perspectives invite us to summon new ways to converse about issues that matter — but matter differently to each of us. Rather than bracing against those who don't share a particular purpose, de Graaf advocates for open dialogue, so we begin to look beyond the current divides and discover integrative ways to develop new rules of engagement, frame new responsibilities, and discover new solutions.

Ananthi Al Ramiah, Gretchen Reydams-Schils, and Matthew Phillips then focus on the crisis of purpose within professions. Premised on purpose to begin with, many professions are struggling with inner distress and outer distrust. Instead of taking purpose for granted, the authors invite professionals to work on it by employing four Stoic virtues (wisdom, courage, justice, and temperance). Quoting philosopher Christopher Gill, who describes virtue as "expertise in leading a happy life,"[3] the authors encourage purpose-driven professionals to reimagine themselves at the center of circles opening up to progressively widening communities, so they can ask how to take setbacks seriously, defy indifference, and reify the joy of tackling what matters most. How can all this hard work make a stressed professional happier, you wonder? Here comes more Greek: *eudaimonia*. Stoics understand happiness as the pursuit of a good soul, using virtues as the North Star. Instead of assuming that professions are purpose-driven, professionals like us can retake charge of one's pursuit of purpose by borrowing three Stoic tools: (1) acknowledging their roles in the many communities they serve, (2) reflecting on how they have performed these key roles, and (3) searching for better ways to keep doing so.

Next, Christian Busch, author of *The Serendipity Mindset: The Art and Science of Creating Good Luck*,[4] and Nele Terveen explain how purpose helps leaders connect the dots between grand challenges and strategic responses. When leaders expect the unexpected, the authors explain, they incent their stakeholders to embrace uncertainty so they can better guide their organizations through adversity and disruption. By leveraging the five practices of Serendipitous Impact (impact mission, impact leadership, impact governance, impact networks, and impact measurement) previewed in a 2022 *MIT Sloan Management Review* article coauthored by Busch,[5] unexpected events can help leaders come up with solutions that often cannot be seen, let alone fully defined, in advance.

How far forward can hardship take purpose-driven leaders? Lara Liboni, Luciana O. Cezarino, Alessandro Goulart, Vera Goulart, and Rafael Petry offer a real-life case of success created from adversity. Before there was a solution, they tell us, there was a problem. This problem was so big, they insist, that it instigated purpose, which then inspired many stakeholders to partner for "Symbiotic Impact." Unlike serendipity, where chance encounters enabled previously unimagined opportunities, the Symbiosis Project carefully crafted first-of-their-kind collaborations to systematically undo barriers keeping marginalized youth from accessing higher education and being employed in competitive sectors.

Wrapping up the issue, Andriy Rozhdestvensky, Sofiya Opatska, and Gerard Seijts (coauthor of *Character: What Contemporary Leaders Can Teach Us About Building a More Just, Prosperous, and Sustainable Future*[6]) move us to extraordinary purpose, counting up to the 1,000 days of Ukraine's resistance to the 2022 Russian invasion. "How can societal leaders come to terms with the damage inflicted on them and then make the substantive shift of returning to a peacetime leadership approach equipped to rebuild and regenerate the country?" the authors ask. The article features hard-won insights from five resilient Ukrainian leaders (from parliament, the armed forces, church, business, the not-for-profit sector, and academia) who open up about their journey to, and undeniable power of, existential purpose.

PURPOSING AS SCOPING

From the authors of "Purpose in Management Research: Navigating a Complex and Fragmented Area of Study," we borrow the idea of scoping dimension as the extent to which purpose is understood as given or co-constructed through complex interactions among many stakeholders.[7] The former, deemed universal, approach to purpose holds leaders up to a single shared measure of moral duty under so-called reasonably foreseeable circumstances. The latter, or contextual approach, lets leaders negotiate what the right thing to do is under unexpected circumstances. Some crises, like inflation or inequality, may be easier to anticipate than others, like wars or global pandemics. When we expect leaders to face critical issues or grand challenges, we tilt this balance from the universal to the contextual.

When polycrisis brings the contextual front and center, leaders of all ages purpose (as a verb)!

Knowing how to purpose is not a new endeavor. Strings of thought tie together ancient philosophers and modern historians. This issue offers a translation of practices that have stood the test of time to the domain of leadership under fire, speaking both figuratively and literally.

Scaffolding purpose requires both saying no to many temptations and saying yes to worthwhile challenges. This issue of *Amplify* coaches leaders in *how* to purpose. It explains how scoping purpose can not only prevent purpose washing in everyday settings, but can also help leaders hold on to their purpose when circumstances call for the extraordinary.

REFERENCES

[1] Branzei, Oana, and Dusya Vera (eds.). "Scaffolding Purpose: An Infrastructure for Humanity." *Amplify*, Vol. 37, No. 8, 2024.

[2] Patrick, Vanessa. *The Power of Saying No: The New Science of How to Say No That Puts You in Charge of Your Life*. Sourcebooks, 2022.

[3] Gill, Christopher. *Learning to Live Naturally: Stoic Ethics and Its Modern Significance*. Oxford University Press, 2023.

4 Busch, Christian. *The Serendipity Mindset: The Art and Science of Creating Good Luck*. Riverhead Books, 2020.

5 Busch, Christian, and Lisa Hehenberger. "How to Evaluate the Impact of Corporate Purpose." *MIT Sloan Management Review*, 27 July 2022.

6 Seijts, Gerard, and Kimberley Young Milani. *Character: What Contemporary Leaders Can Teach Us About Building a More Just, Prosperous, and Sustainable Future*. ECW Press, 2024.

7 Chua, Nathania, et al. "Purpose in Management Research: Navigating a Complex and Fragmented Area of Study." *Academy of Management Annals*, Vol. 18, No. 2, July 2024.

About the guest editors

OANA BRANZEI AND DUSYA VERA

Oana Branzei is the Paul MacPherson Chair in Strategic Leadership and Professor of Strategy and Sustainability at the Ivey Business School, Western University, Canada. She is also founding Director of Ivey's HBA Sustainability Certificate program and the Master of Science Graduate Diploma in Sustainability; founder, convener, and host of Ivey's PhD Sustainability Academy; and cofounder of the Spring Institute. As Ivey's champion for the United Nation's Principles for Responsible Management Education (UN PRME) for a decade, Dr. Branzei has pioneered the environmental, social, and governance (ESG) and UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) case curations and global conversations for Ivey Publishing. She leads the Global Regeneration Lab, initially established with funding from her 2010 Early Researcher Award. The lab comprises collaboration with rapid-response research teams tackling grand challenges across five continents. As a former Western Faculty Scholar, Dr. Branzei is cross-appointed with Western University's Centre for Climate Change, Sustainable Livelihoods and Health; is an advisor board member for the Africa Institute; and sits on the steering committee for Western's Carbon Solutions Fund. She has chaired the Social Sciences Panel for the Early Researcher Awards for Ontario's Ministry of Innovation since 2018; vice chaired the Western University Research Board; represented Ivey on Western's Senate; and adjudicated the Ontario COVID-19 Rapid Research Fund. Dr. Branzei earned an MBA in international business from the University of Nebraska and a PhD in business administration from the University of British Columbia, Canada. She can be reached at obranzei@ivey.ca.

Dusya Vera is Professor of Strategy, Ian O. Ihnatowycz Chair in Leadership, and Executive Director of the Ian O. Ihnatowycz Institute for Leadership at the Ivey Business School, Western University, Canada. Dr. Vera's expertise spans the areas of strategic leadership, leader character, improvisation, and organizational learning. She has been published in top academic publications, including *Academy of Management Review, Academy of Management Annals, Organization Science, Journal of Management, Journal of Management Studies, Leadership Quarterly, Organization Studies, Journal of Organizational Behavior*, and *Management Learning*, among others. Dr. Vera also writes extensively for practitioner audiences in practitioner-oriented journals, such as *Organizational Dynamics* and *Business Horizons*. She coedited the *Routledge Companion to Improvisation in Organizations* and is currently Associate Editor of *Academy of Management Discoveries*. Dr. Vera earned a PhD in strategic management from the Ivey Business School. She can be reached at dvera@ivey.ca.

PLEASE SAY NO!

HOW EMPOWERED REFUSAL UPHOLDS PURPOSE

Authors
_____

Vanessa M. Patrick and Murali Kuppuswamy

It is surprising, and often disconcerting, to observe a disconnect between what a company professes its purpose to be and the activities it engages in. The notion that pursuing one's purpose requires you to not engage in activities that do not align with purpose seems straightforward, yet we frequently observe just that.

Sometimes the disconnect between actions and purpose is stark. Take Wells Fargo, which states its purpose this way: "With more than 150 years of experience, we're focused on helping you figure out the financial solutions for every stage of your life. We offer convenient ways to help you manage your money, protect your finances, and reach your financial goals."[1]

Despite this, in 2016, under pressure to meet aggressive sales targets, Wells Fargo employees created millions of bank accounts and credit card applications without customer consent, in clear violation of the stated purpose. "What were they thinking?!" one might exclaim. The answer most likely is "they weren't," perhaps because when the sales numbers started looking good, there were no systems in place to pump the brakes, so everyone simply went on doing what they felt needed to be done.

In this article, we propose that an essential element of scaffolding purpose is empowered refusal — a way of saying no to organizational activities and pursuits that do not align with your purpose, no matter how attractive they might seem. We discuss the hidden trade-offs in pursuing purpose, provide three key reasons organizations might pursue opportunities that are not aligned with their purpose, and reveal why it is so easy to stray from purpose and engage in purpose-diminishing activities. We then offer a nuanced understanding of empowered refusal by describing three different kinds of no and a framework for implementation.

THE MISSING NO

According to Ratan Tata, former CEO of the Tata Group, purpose is "a spiritual and moral call to action; it is what a person or company stands for." The power of articulating purpose lies in providing employees with a clear sense of direction, a set of shared priorities, and the inspiration to go the extra mile in service of purpose-driven goals, which should ultimately be good for profit.[2]

> **SOMETIMES THE DISCONNECT BETWEEN ACTIONS & PURPOSE IS STARK**

Table 1 summarizes key insights offered by researchers and practitioners on what needs to be done to create and sustain purpose in organizations. Notably missing from this list is the ability to say no to purpose-diminishing decisions, activities, and engagements.

DIMENSION	Quinn and Thakor (2018)[1]	Rey et al. (2019)[2]	Rey et al. (2019)[3]	Almandoz et al. (2018)[4]	This article
Envision an inspired workforce	✓				
Discover the purpose/set a clear mission & measure/ understand the importance of purpose (*knowledge*)	✓		✓	✓	
Recognize the need for authenticity/visible commitment from leadership/perceived coherence between purpose & practice (*authenticity*)	✓		✓		
Turn authentic message into constant message/ frequently recalling of purpose (*communication*)	✓		✓		
Stimulate individual learning	✓				
Turn mid-level managers into purpose-driven leaders/connect people to purpose/foster consistent culture through people management/cultivate better managers (*people management*)	✓			✓	
Unleash positive energizers	✓				
Ensure aligned autonomy		✓			
Seek visible commitment of coworkers			✓		
Focus on making daily work meaningful				✓	
Pay attention to peripheries				✓	
Practice the essential no					✓
Practice the exemplifying no					✓
Practice the enabling no					✓

[1]Quinn, Robert E., and Anjan V. Thakor. "Creating a Purpose-Driven Organization." *Harvard Business Review,* July-August 2018.

[2]Rey, Carlos, et al. "Agile Purpose: Overcoming Bureaucracy." In *Purpose-Driven Organizations: Management Ideas for a Better World,* edited by Carlos Rey, Miguel Bastons, and Phil Sotok. Palgrave Macmillan, 2019.

[3]Rey, Carlos, Frederic Marimon, and Marta Mas-Machuca. "Key Factors in Purpose Internalization." In *Purpose-Driven Organizations: Management Ideas for a Better World,* edited by Carlos Rey, Miguel Bastons, and Phil Sotok. Palgrave Macmillan, 2019.

[4]Almandoz, John, Yih-Teen Lee, and Alberto Ribera. "Unleashing the Power of Purpose." IESE Business School, University of Navarra, 1 April 2018.

Table 1. Dimensions that drive purpose

EMPOWERED REFUSAL

Prior research describes empowered refusal as a way of saying no that stems from the identity and underscores the value of an empowered no in both interpersonal and self-regulatory contexts.[3,4] This research demonstrates that empowered refusal facilitates relationship management, reputation management, and goal pursuit.

In an organizational context, *purpose is akin to identity*.

We describe empowered refusal as a way of saying no that aligns with the organization's purpose. The central thesis of current research is that to operate with a singularity of purpose requires every individual in the organization to have clarity about which actions and decisions align with that purpose and which do not.

The goal of empowered refusal is to be true to espoused organizational values that are reflected in purpose. As such, empowered refusal is an essential skill that organizations need to develop to align their actions and decisions with purpose.

Implementing the ideas in Table 1 is an excellent starting point for leaders committed to driving purpose in their organizations, but we don't feel it is enough. We underscore the importance of matching espoused values (purpose) with enacted values (decisions and actions) by fostering a culture that empowers individuals to wield the power of no in service of scaffolding purpose.

THE HIDDEN TRADE-OFFS IN PURSUING PURPOSE

What you don't do determines what you can do.

— Tim Ferriss, lifestyle guru[5]

When an organization articulates its purpose, it must consider an inherent trade-off. Committing to a purpose implies that (1) you have to engage in purpose-driven activities without distraction, and (2) you have to give up all purpose-diminishing activities, no matter how exciting and enticing they might be.

In our research, we have identified three overarching reasons why it is easy to allow purpose-diminishing activities to occur or make non-purpose-driven decisions instead of saying an empowered no:

1. **Culture of cooperation.** Cooperation with others is a commonly held and highly valued social norm. In an interpersonal context, saying no to the requests and invitations of others is often viewed to be a less favored response with negative consequences.[6] Organizations are composed of people, so by a similar logic, there is also widespread reluctance in organizational settings to say no to the ideas and initiatives of others. We believe there are two main reasons why individuals say yes when they should say no. First, they fear saying no to others' ideas because they worry about the rejection of their own ideas later. Given the informal quid pro quo that exists in the reality of organizational life, it's easier to say yes than to say no to the proposals of others. Second, people are afraid that saying no can have negative consequences. Naysayers are often seen as unlikeable and poor team players, making them less likely to be chosen for desirable promotions, lucrative transfers, or exciting projects. Both concerns are diminished with empowered refusal, because empowered refusal makes it clear that a no is not stubborn naysaying or a rejection of others' ideas, but instead a strategic response that aligns people and the organization to purpose.

2. **Fear of missing out (FOMO).** Organizations often fear missing out on the latest thing, often without carefully evaluating whether and how the new thing fits with purpose. Indeed, the lure of the new is so deeply embedded in organizational culture that we often measure progress by the adoption of cutting-edge innovation. For example, although AI is a critical technology for most organizations, it is important to think through how to use AI to enhance purpose instead of blindly jumping on the AI bandwagon. Making it a practice to view any new opportunity through a purpose-driven lens can reduce FOMO.

3. **Misaligned and short-term incentives.** The exciting part of the purpose journey is defining and communicating it. The less exciting part is the detail-heavy work of aligning operating mechanisms with it. This includes performance metrics and incentives. If these are not updated to reflect the purpose, leaders and employees will see the purpose as "good on paper" and continue to act in ways that could be purpose-diminishing. It is easy to get lost in this chasm between strategy formulation and strategy implementation without the power of no.[7]

IT'S EASIER TO SAY YES THAN TO SAY NO TO THE PROPOSALS OF OTHERS

HOW EMPOWERED REFUSAL UPHOLDS PURPOSE

Given that empowered refusal is a way of saying no that gives voice to organizational values and reflects its purpose, it is critical to recognize the nuanced situations that call for different kinds of no to effectively scaffold purpose. The following three types can help any organization steer clear of purpose-diminishing activities.

1. THE ESSENTIAL NO

It may seem obvious that an organization should say no to anything that is clearly contradictory to its stated purpose. A useful exercise for organizational leadership is to not merely define purpose, but also to articulate the activities, decisions, and initiatives that do not align with purpose. Executive coach Marshall Goldsmith calls this the "do not do" list.

As authors Robert Quinn and Anjan Thakor observe: "When a company announces its purpose and values but the words don't govern the behavior of senior leadership, they ring hollow. Everyone recognizes the hypocrisy, and employees become more cynical."[8]

When an organization hesitates to exercise the essential no, it spells a death knell for purpose. Unfortunately, there are many prominent examples of organizations that did not say the essential no with costly consequences, including the aforementioned Wells Fargo.

Let's consider Volkswagen, with corporate values that say: "Upright, regulation-compliant conduct is critically important to the success and resilience of the Volkswagen Group." Yet in 2015, the US Environment Protection Agency (EPA) revealed that Volkswagen had violated the Clean Air Act by installing illegal software into diesel vehicles. The software made the cars appear to comply with environmental standards during testing while emitting pollutants far exceeding legal limits. It is clear that neither the leaders nor the engineering and manufacturing teams of Volkswagen invoked the essential no to steer clear of the temptation to circumvent EPA rules.

Consider Purdue Pharma, which said its purpose was to be "a pioneer in developing medications for reducing pain, a principal cause of human suffering." In 2020, Purdue Pharma pleaded guilty to criminal charges related to marketing OxyContin, the addictive painkiller. Penalties reached roughly US $8.3 billion. The company marketed the opioid to more than 100 doctors suspected of illegal prescriptions and lying to the US Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA).[9]

This is an instance where not just those in the organization but many in the broader ecosystem (physicians, drug dispensers, and management consultants) did not say the essential no to practices that were starkly contrary to the stated purpose.

2. THE EXEMPLIFYING NO

An exemplifying no is often a bold or unconventional decision made by a leader that signals commitment to purpose. When Indra Nooyi was CEO of Pepsi from 2007 to 2019, she transformed Pepsi with her "Performance with Purpose" strategy focused on financial, human, environmental, and talent sustainability.

In describing that transformation, she said: "Taking bold actions early is critical for showing the organization that the purpose-driven strategy is not just the flavor of the day. Three things will send a clear message: creating high-profile leadership positions and filling many of them with outsiders; overturning decisions that would have made it through in the 'old days;' and letting some people go."

One of the examples Nooyi mentions relates to overturning a decision that would have made it through in the old days. She recalls: "Another action that communicated volumes was a late-in-the-game decision to call off a major new product launch…. Just days before the planned launch, the product came to the notice of a senior executive who was not comfortable that the company would introduce a highly caffeinated snack that children might consume. He stopped its development, despite the costs that had already been incurred…."

Another difficult decision involved letting people go. This decision demonstrated that the purpose-driven strategy was not just the flavor of the day but an enduring commitment. She reflected, "Critics will always emerge, especially in the upper echelons of an organization. It's important to involve them and engage in a transparent dialogue with them, pointing to the existential threat that the company may face tomorrow. It's equally important to incorporate their legitimate concerns in implementing the strategy. However, if detractors aren't converted within a reasonable period of time, they should not be allowed to continue to serve on the management team."[10]

We believe that the exemplifying no is a critical tool that leaders can rely on to demonstrate commitment to saying no to purpose-diminishing activities.

3. THE ENABLING NO

The essential no and the exemplifying no largely depend on senior leaders' choices and actions. The enabling no offers all stakeholders in the organization (employees, suppliers, customers) permission to say no in service of purpose. The rationale behind the enabling no is that purpose should not be the responsibility of a special few; it should be embodied in the actions of everyone in the organization who believes in it and is eager to bring it to life.

Take Toyota's famous "Jidoka" or "Stop the Line" culture, in which any operator could stop the production line by pulling a cord when they noticed an abnormality. Toyota instilled purpose in every employee. There was no need for reporting, escalating to superiors, or waiting for directions. If an abnormality was observed, operators had the authority (and responsibility) to stop the line. This is an example of enabling no that makes Jidoka (automation with human touch) a living reality.

The principle of subsidiarity posits that matters should be handled at the most decentralized level such that embedding subsidiarity in purpose results in employees and other stakeholders having the autonomy and support to make purpose-driven decisions when necessary.[11] We borrow from Josh Bernoff and Ted Schadler's notion of HERO (highly empowered and resourceful operatives) employees who, with the guidance and help of the organization, can be the ones who carry out purpose-driven activities and monitor operations and actions to ensure that purpose-diminishing initiatives are nipped in the bud.[12]

The enabled no can also be used to empower customers. Take Patagonia's full-page advertisement in *The New York Times* on Black Friday in 2011 that said, "Don't Buy This Jacket." The goal was to encourage consumers to say no to excessive and wasteful consumption and to consider the environmental impact of their purchases. The advertisement also promoted sustainability and the idea of reuse, recycle, reduce.

PLEASE

To put empowered refusal into practice, we offer an easy-to-remember implementation formula (PLEASE) for using the three shades of no to scaffold purpose:

– **Plan (for the essential no).** Right at the start, define a few essential "nos" and communicate them along with the purpose message. It will clarify what purpose is and is not to the organization.

– **Look (spot opportunities for the exemplifying no).** Actively look for opportunities to deploy the exemplifying no. If they do not seem to exist, it is likely that the purpose is not clear enough or is not understood by all levels of the organization.

– **Encourage (offer permission for the enabling no).** Be an evangelist for the purpose and communicate it to all stakeholders: employees, partners, customers, and suppliers. Ask employees to articulate what purpose means for them and give them permission to say no to activities not aligned with purpose.

– **Act (with courage and commitment).** Make bold and visible decisions that say no with a sense of urgency. A reluctant no is almost the same as a resigned yes.

– **Spread (share stories with passion).** Make the "stories of no" part of a broader narrative on purpose. Spreading these widely and telling them frequently will help make the purpose meaningful for the organization.

– **Embed (instill the capability).** Monitor decisions to step away and ensure that all three shades of no are being exercised. Their combined power can build a strong, sustainable scaffold for purpose.

CONCLUSION

We believe that organizations benefit when no is not viewed as a bad word but a necessary one. When all three types of no (essential, exemplifying, and enabling) are exercised, their power increases exponentially. A powerful and virtuous cycle is created that propels purpose forward when:

- Employees and customers trust that the organization's natural and immediate response to anything that goes against the purpose is an emphatic no.

- Employees see leaders making tough decisions, including saying no to what would have been acceptable before.

- HERO employees across all levels believe in their ability to say no when they observe things that could derail the purpose.

- Partners and industry peers respect the organization's purpose and want to join forces to say no to business as usual.

REFERENCES

1 "Why Wells Fargo." Well Fargo, accessed September 2024.

2 Birkinshaw, Julian, Nicolai J. Foss, and Siegwart Lindenberg. "Combining Purpose with Profits." *MIT Sloan Management Review*, 19 February 2014.

3 Patrick, Vanessa M., and Henrik Hagtvedt. "'I Don't' Versus 'I Can't': When Empowered Refusal Motivates Goal-Directed Behavior." *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 39, No. 2, November 2011.

4 Patrick, Vanessa. *The Power of Saying No: The New Science of How to Say No That Puts You in Charge of Your Life*. Sourcebooks, 2023.

5 Ferriss, Tim. "The Not-To-Do List: 9 Habits to Stop Now." Tim Ferriss blog, 16 August 2007.

6 Patrick (see 4).

7 Tawse, Alex, Vanessa M. Patrick, and Dusya Vera. "Crossing the Chasm: Leadership Nudges to Help Transition from Strategy Formulation to Strategy Implementation." *Business Horizons*, Vol. 62, No. 2, March-April 2019.

8 Quinn, Robert E., and Anjan V. Thakor. "Creating a Purpose-Driven Organization." *Harvard Business Review*, July-August 2018.

9 Gunderman, Richard. "Oxycontin: How Purdue Pharma Helped Spark the Opioid Epidemic." *The Conversation*, 19 April 2016.

10 Nooyi, Indra K., and Vijay Govindarajan. "Becoming a Better Corporate Citizen." *Harvard Business Review*, March-April 2020.

11 Hollensbe, Elaine, et al. "Organizations with Purpose." *Academy of Management Journal*, Vol. 57, No. 5, September 2014.

12 Bernoff, Josh, and Ted Schadler. "Empowered." *Harvard Business Review*, July–August 2010.

About the authors

Vanessa M. Patrick is Associate Dean for Research, Executive Director of Doctoral Programs, and Bauer Professor of Marketing at the C.T. Bauer School of Business, the University of Houston. Her award-winning research focuses on the strategies to achieve personal mastery and inspire everyday excellence in oneself and others, and she is a pioneer in the study of everyday consumer aesthetics. Dr. Patrick is author of *The Power of Saying No: The New Science of How to Say No That Puts You in Charge of Your Life*; she has been published widely in top-tier academic journals in psychology, marketing, and management; and her work has appeared in *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, NPR, *Los Angeles Times*, *Businessweek*, *Fast Company*, *Forbes*, *Huffington Post*, and *The Washington Post*. She is President-Elect of the Society for Consumer Psychology. Dr. Patrick earned a PhD in business from the University of Southern California. She can be reached at vpatrick@bauer.uh.edu.

Murali Kuppuswamy is Chief HR Officer for two major US publicly listed companies. He has worked and lived in the US, UK, and India, leading multiple global teams. Mr. Kuppuswamy is pursuing an executive doctoral degree at the C.T. Bauer College of Business, the University of Houston. His research focuses on CEO and top management team dynamics and effectiveness, the design of inclusive processes, and the human aspects of technology adaptation in organizations. He can be reached at kuppmur28@outlook.com.

RECLAIMING PURPOSE

THE ART & SCIENCE OF ASKING GOOD QUESTIONS

Author

Kanina Blanchard

Headlines highlight how, in the pursuit of power and profit, decision makers continue to put our planet in peril. Surveys show that most people no longer trust decision makers to tell the truth or privilege anyone but themselves or their organizations.[1] Research shows that people feel increasingly alienated and disengaged, partly due to the unyielding focus on individual economic success and excessive work hours. Those examining the role of consumerism in shaping identity and well-being are talking about a "purpose void," as individuals seek fulfillment through the acquisition of material possessions and experience a growing sense of isolation and diminished hope for a sense of community and shared purpose.[2]

Within this context, revelations of how companies are usurping our human need to be purposeful for economic gain ("purpose-washing") represent another challenge and risk to our collective ability to change the current downward trajectory.[3] Understood as "the practice of companies or organizations using the language of social or environmental responsibility to mask their true intentions and actions," purpose washing involves the deceitful use of communication and marketing techniques "to [promote] a positive image rather than actually making meaningful change."[4]

A CRISIS OF PURPOSE

Amid our profit-driven culture, it is perhaps not surprising (although concerning) that connecting purpose to profit has become big business. Some scholars discuss the possibility of shifting from a goal-based purpose (profit, productivity, etc.) to one grounded in a sense of duty toward a higher purpose and broader societal values and expectations. However, in practice, the lure of exploiting the purpose-profit link is proving too much for some to ignore.[5]

Beginning around 2017, a number of articles, blogs, and books began to emerge raising concerns about the crisis of purpose and meaninglessness facing employees in organizations and humanity in general. Soon after, the Big Four consulting firms weighed in on how to lead with purpose.[6-8] "Cheat sheets" emerged for leading with purpose, and some experts noted that purpose-driven companies witnessed higher market share gains and growth.

THE LURE OF EXPLOITING THE PURPOSE-PROFIT LINK IS PROVING TOO MUCH FOR SOME TO IGNORE

A few years later, *Forbes* published "The Power of Purpose: The Business Case for Purpose," quoting the Kantar "Purpose 2020" study. The study highlighted how, over a 12-year period, brands with high perceived positive societal impact experienced brand value growth of 175% versus 86% for those seen to have medium positive social impact and 70% for low positive impact.[9,10] According to these sources, connecting purpose to brand reputation can lead to success.

Research indicates that some stakeholders (customers, employees, governments, etc.) believe that by investing in or buying from "purpose-driven" companies, they are doing their part to solve a problem or support a need far greater than themselves. Others feel they are being manipulated into being a cog in an economic wheel that keeps turning at any expense, purpose included.

There are dark sides to hijacking purpose as an economic instrument: when stakeholders feel betrayed, purpose-washing can have negative reputational and financial consequences. Being purpose-washed as a client, customer, employee, investor, supplier, supporter, or volunteer can result in individuals feeling cynical, disillusioned, and disconnected.[11] When a stakeholder gets repeatedly purpose-washed, they may end up feeling even more purposeless.[12]

How can we reclaim purpose? Let's begin with an understanding that living life with a sense of belonging and meaning is not something that's bestowed on us. Rather, it develops over time and is influenced by factors such as individual experiences, values, and beliefs. For humans, purpose provides a sense of direction, motivation, and satisfaction in life. It is linked to improved mental and physical health as well as resilience in the face of challenges and setbacks.[13]

Taking the time to think critically and focus attention on the questions we ask (of ourselves and others) opens the door to curating a purposive life. And reclaiming our individual sense of purpose lets us reengage collectively, work collaboratively, and turn toward a better future together.

GOOD QUESTIONS

For decades, we have instructed children to not judge a book by its cover. We ask students to dig deeper and not be satisfied by what they see. As business professionals, we have learned to scrutinize our leaders — their actions, behaviors, choices, and decisions. Why? The power of critical thinking is central to our ability to navigate life's complexities.[14] At its essence, critical thinking is about thinking deeply and independently. It involves considering different perspectives, exploring assumptions, evaluating evidence, and coming to logical conclusions through reasoned judgment. The engine that fuels critical thinking is knowledge collected by asking good questions.

As children, we were obsessed with questions because we were hungry to learn. Unfortunately, many of us lost that zeal in grade school, as expectations to memorize information, regurgitate facts, and behave politely became the priority.[15] As adults, many of us shy away from asking "good" questions. There are multiple reasons for this, including not having the time, wanting to keep discussions at a "high" level, not really wanting to know the answer, being afraid of the possible answer, not wanting others to think we don't know the answer, and not wanting to trigger emotions by asking.

The truth is, many of us have forgotten how to ask good questions. As with most human activities, asking good questions is both an art and a science. But asking good questions, processing answers, and acting on the meaning we make is foundational to human growth and development.

ASKING QUESTIONS

The best communicators and leaders combine the art and science of asking good questions of others and themselves. Whether to build better relationships, create an open and safe team culture, innovate, or get to the root cause of an issue, it takes courage and humility to ask pertinent, insightful, challenging questions. Doing so is also key to inspiring trust and getting others to engage and share their ideas.[16] At the individual level, these communicators and leaders become life-long learners, willing to ask questions like "How can I do better?"; "What am I not seeing or considering?"; and "Who can I reach out to for support or insights?"

THE SCIENCE

Good questions share some key dimensions: they are clear, concise, and relevant. Each question addresses a specific purpose, whether to challenge assumptions, gather information, provoke curiosity, or stimulate new pathways for thinking. Posing questions is a strategic endeavor: what you ask, the order in which you ask, and when you ask matter. The time of day and other contextual realities can have a tremendous impact on the answers you receive, as well as the answers you produce yourself. Anyone with a teenager in the house or in the classroom knows not to ask anything, let alone anything serious, early in the day! At work, brainstorming sessions are best held mid-morning, while questions to which you want quick answers with little to no input are great to hold until near the end of the day when most people are focused on wrapping up.

Asking why, what, when, where, and how is the first step, and learning to elevate those questions is the next. For example, "Why not?"; "What if?"; "Where else?"; and "How other?" are simple examples of how to shift perspectives, deepen conversations, and unearth innovative ideas and possibilities. A well-constructed question is open-ended, allowing for various responses and perspectives that encourage further inquiry and discussion. Well-considered questions direct attention to specific aspects of a problem or issue and help reveal assumptions and biases.

> **THE BEST COMMUNICATORS & LEADERS COMBINE THE ART & SCIENCE OF ASKING GOOD QUESTIONS OF OTHERS & THEMSELVES**

Taking the time to focus on the quality of questions asked (i.e., making them thought-provoking) can also have a strong impact. Consider how at the end of an interview, the interviewer often asks, "Do you have any questions for us?" A response such as, "When will you be making your decision?" is universally seen as a weak response. An interviewee who wants to demonstrate their knowledge through a question might ask, "In reviewing recent posts from activists, I have read about increasing demands for transparency related to your ESG metrics. How are you addressing those concerns?"

THE ART

The art of asking good questions involves many dimensions. It starts with an ability and willingness to engage with vulnerability and empathy. Connecting with others means acknowledging that there may be concerns, fears, and triggers associated with the inquiry. Showing patience, learning to "nudge" the discussion forward slowly and with care, and reading the room comes with time and experience.

Vulnerability and empathy are key to building one's emotional intelligence. Recently, a Harvard-based researcher shared how emotionally intelligent people consistently ask meaningful questions that elicit deep feelings.[17] For example, you might ask: "How did you get into…?"; "What are your thoughts on…?"; or "How do you feel about…?" People who develop this capacity are known for leaving people feeling seen, heard, and valued. Other researchers have highlighted how emotionally intelligent people develop resilience by drawing on their self-exploration to share their personal mistakes and failures. Emotionally intelligent people also practice developing gratitude by asking themselves questions like "How can I learn to be grateful for this experience?"[18]

The artistic component of asking good questions involves one's interpersonal skills: the "how" of asking. Recognize that the words you speak are just the starting point, followed by focusing on one's presence — tone of voice, posture, energy level, gestures, and eye contact, to name a few. Most people do not remember exactly what was said during an interaction, but they remember how they felt.

The use of nonverbals is crucial in creating an environment where others are comfortable opening up.[19] For example, using a booming voice to ask personal questions will immediately shut down the conversation. Using a dismissive tone will not compel someone to share their heartfelt issues with you. How you speak to yourself is equally important. Instead of "You dummy, why did you do that again?" try "What can I do differently next time?"

Artistic elements include active listening and the ability to respond or adapt to your audience's verbal and nonverbal cues. Recognizing that what is said is often different than what is meant, one must be observant and develop the ability to read cues such as awkward pauses, refusal to make eye contact, and the emergence of micro-tells like a twitch (or behavior like hand-wringing and ring-twisting).

Being able to combine the art and science of asking questions leads to the most valuable answers from your audience. Equally important are the questions you ask yourself. Understanding the art and science of asking questions and building one's skillset evolves over time and requires practice. Journalists, members of the medical community, researchers, and marketing and sales professionals are among those who are trained in the art and science of asking questions, but asking good questions is a skill that can be learned.

RECLAIMING PURPOSE

Asking good questions helps us better understand our aspirations, goals, and values. Having worked with leaders of all ages and career stages, I can attest to the fact that discussion about their struggles to define their own sense of purpose (sometimes they talk about finding a "North Star") emerges as a common topic for exploration. Beyond pursuing the next promotion or bonus, students, professionals, leaders, and executives are searching for deeper meaning in their work and their lives.

The path to reclaim a purposive life is a challenging one that begins with the self-awareness to "recognize" a void exists and a willingness to unpack the reasons. The next step is developing the skills and competencies to "resist" the purpose-washing that is so ubiquitous now. Finally, we need the courage and commitment to "reorient" while remaining vigilant to factors that may negatively impact us along the journey.

RECOGNIZE

It is natural to feel a bit adrift at times, but when those feelings start to run deep, it is time to engage. This process takes courage, but by engaging, you are using your agency and choosing to work toward a better future. Start by asking yourself some basic questions and do so with care and patience. Be open to authentic answers and create the time and space you will need to explore. You might ask: "Am I interested or even inspired by what I am doing?"; "Do I have a sense of direction? What am I doing and why?"; "Am I proud to share with people what I do, how I spend my time, what I am thinking about the quality of my life?"; "Do I feel a sense of belonging with the people I spend most of my time with?"; and "Who do I know that seems very focused and purposive?"

With some initial answers in hand, dig deeper: "What inspires me and makes me want to get going in the morning?"; "How can I create a sense of direction and feel proud about what I am doing and why?"; "When have I felt like I belonged with a group of people, and what impact did that have on me?"; and "If I were working toward something I would be really proud to share, what would that be?"

Meaningful inquiry can feel overwhelming, but it has the potential to create a sense of excitement for the future. The answers you offer yourself are a gift, so accept them with grace. Don't be judgmental about your own thoughts. Through this iterative process, strive to define what a meaningful life means to you. Articulate the things you want to dedicate yourself to doing and how you want to be in service to the people or things that matter most. Come back regularly to your journal (or wherever you have expressed yourself) and check in. Your purpose will likely evolve over time.

RESIST

As you begin to better understand yourself, it is important to identify factors that are unhealthy for you: those that contribute to the sense of purposelessness. These factors may stem from the norms and values of family, friends, peers, or your community. They may arise from your work culture. There are also factors that pervade society, including constant pressure to equate success with money, power with happiness, and the accumulation of material goods with a life of purpose.

Resisting starts with questions. Identify where the pressures stem from, including people, places, and things. Then ask yourself why they have such an impact on you. You must also look inward. How are you measuring living meaningfully and purposefully? Have you set reasonable or unattainable targets and expectations for yourself? Take the time to consider whether you are resisting out of anxiety, lack of time, or fear that the effort will not be worthwhile.

Finally, reflect on the importance of not going at it alone. Circles of trusted partners can help you explore and support you as you choose to do things differently. By exploring your answers, you can dig as deep as necessary and begin to articulate how to approach and address the factors that negatively influence you. Resistance can help you become less susceptible to phenomena like purpose-washing.

REORIENT

Having done the difficult work of identifying what matters most to you, you will know which direction to steer. But you must invest the time, care, and attention to stay the course. You must also set some guardrails — processes and checkpoints to fend off the inevitable risks and challenges. Storms, winds, and gales will come and go; anticipate them and be prepared to navigate through or around. Keep asking questions of yourself and of your crew (after all, you shouldn't sail the seas alone). Learn from experience, stay curious, and be open to questioning assumptions.

Don't forget to select your crew with care, using the art and science of asking good questions. Remember that it's not just about whether they can perform certain tasks, it's about whether or not you're aligned with how they choose to do them. When you find yourself wavering, embrace the discomfort, and return to the type of questions that help you return to your path: "How am I feeling?"; "Have changes in my life impacted how I feel about my purpose?"; "Are the people I am with supporting my growth and direction?"; and "Am I doing the same for them?"

HOW TO ASK

One of my students was struggling a few years ago. They went from an energized, active, focused young professional to a shadow of themselves. After struggling through exams, they came in tears to my office and shared how pursuing a business degree was their father's dream, not their own. The bravado they presented in the first few months of school withered under the weight of unhappiness and feeling as though they didn't fit in with classmates who seemed to be confidently pursuing job leads in finance and consulting. They shared that their dream was to work in a specific not-for-profit in their home country but that doing so would be a disappointment for family members who had made many sacrifices to allow their only child to study abroad.

Over several conversations, the student considered questions I asked them and asked further questions of themselves. Did their family know how unhappy and unfulfilled they were? Had they considered how a business degree might help them in the not-for-profit world? How could they create a path for themselves that could include both? Through hard work and focus, they found the courage to speak with their family and discuss the path they hoped to follow. Ultimately, the student earned an undergraduate business degree and went on to complete a graduate degree in their home country. They are now helping a large, regional not-for-profit with fundraising and creating partnerships with local businesses.

I once coached a senior VP of engineering for a large multinational company that was struggling with how to spend the first year of retirement. He was offered prestigious board positions and a lucrative contract to consult at his employer. Reflecting on a series of questions, he was at once deeply worried about his answers and at the same time invigorated. Asked what he imagined himself doing after retiring, he shared how he wanted to take his grandchildren to school and be an active part of their daily lives. He said he felt some regret about not being present during his own children's younger years. He did a lot of self-exploration and procrastinated for almost a month, worried about what others would say if he said no to the offers. Finally, he spoke with his wife and close friends. They encouraged him to do what gave him the greatest sense of purpose, and he found the courage to create a new chapter for himself. Some didn't understand his choices and even teased him about his decision, but over time, he refocused on deepening his connection to his family.

Clearly, by skillfully practicing the science and the art of asking good questions, we can recognize purpose voids, resist purpose-washing, and redirect ourselves toward purpose.

REFERENCES

[1] "2024 Edelman Trust Barometer." Edelman, accessed September 2024.

[2] George, Gerard, et al. "Purpose in the For-Profit Firm: A Review and Framework for Management Research." *Journal of Management*, Vol. 49, No. 6, April 2021.

[3] Bonior, Andrea. "4 Immediate Steps to Combat a Sense of Helplessness." *Psychology Today*, 30 June 2022.

[4] "Definition: Purpose Washing." Dictionary Marketing, accessed September 2024.

[5] George et al. (see 2).

[6] Genaus, Giorgio. "Finding a Sense of Purpose Work Amid Crisis." *Forbes*, 18 April 2023.

7 Johnston, Charles. "Humanity's Crisis of Purpose." *Psychology Today*, 13 June 2019.

8 Steger, Michael F. "Creating Meaning and Purpose at Work." In *The Wiley Blackwell Handbook of the Psychology of Positivity and Strengths-Based Approaches at Work*, edited by Lindsay G. Oades et al. Wiley-Blackwell, 2017.

9 "Purpose 2020." Kantar, 18 May 2018.

10 Aziz, Afdhel. "The Power of Purpose: The Business Case for Purpose (All the Data You Were Looking for Pt 1)." *Forbes*, 7 March 2020.

11 Brooks, David. "How America Got Mean." *The Atlantic*, 14 August 2023.

12 George et al. (see 2).

13 Warren, Rick. *The Purpose Driven Life: What on Earth Am I Here for?* Zondervan, 2012.

14 Kahneman, Daniel. *Thinking, Fast and Slow*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011.

15 Berger, Warren. *The Book of Beautiful Questions*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018.

16 Maxwell, John C. *Good Leaders Ask Great Questions: Your Foundation for Successful Leadership*. Center Street, 2014.

17 Woo, Jenny. "Harvard-Trained Researcher: People with High Emotional Intelligence Always Do 3 Things When Talking to Others." CNBC, 18 July 2024.

18 Murphy, Bill, Jr. "Emotionally Intelligent People Use a Single Brilliant Question to Find Gratitude and Live Happier Lives." *Inc.*, 23 November 2023.

19 Patrick, Wendy L. "What to Say to Make People Remember You — Fondly." *Psychology Today*, 24 January 2021.

About the author

Kanina Blanchard is Assistant Professor of General Management and Communications at Ivey Business School, Western University, Canada, where she is also Academic Director for CEMS Alliance. Dr. Blanchard has extensive experience working in international business, the public service, nonprofit, and consulting. With over 35 years' global experience, she combines practical, dynamic expertise with extensive research and academic credentials, grounding her teaching and consulting in the creation of transformative and sustainable change. Drawing from her expertise in organizational and communication challenges as well as issue, crisis, and change management, her greatest passion is leadership development, education, and coaching. Dr. Blanchard aims to support those seeking to grow and develop their character, competencies, and commitment. As an academic, her focus is on responsible leadership, women in leadership, and supporting diversity, equity, and inclusion. Dr. Blanchard earned a master's degree in critical policy, equity and leadership, and education and a PhD in education and leadership from Western University. She can be reached at kblanchard@ivey.ca.

DEVELOPING CORPORATE PURPOSE THROUGH DELIBERATION
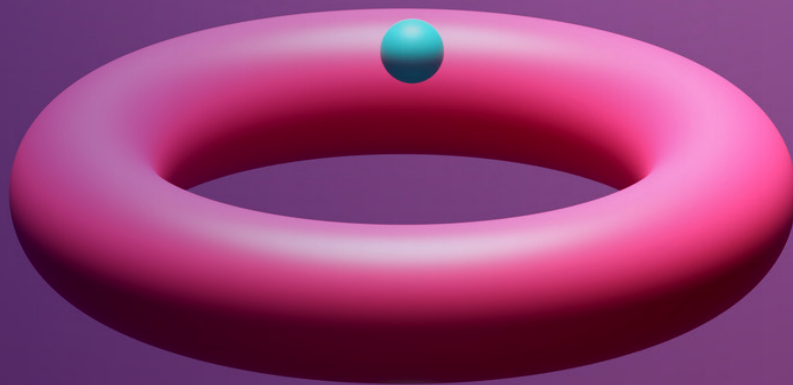
Author

Frank Jan de Graaf

The human tendency toward black-and-white thinking is intensifying. It's apparent in political debate, of course, but also frames how we look at business. Since most companies are profit-driven and free to interpret their own social responsibility, they tend to develop deliberation processes that push them toward purposes that are beneficial to the company in the long term. This process of deliberation, in which small gestures are decisive, is structured in governance mechanisms.

This polarization is a critical issue. After the 2019 American Business Roundtable explicitly said that companies should serve all their stakeholders, some US states tried to block corporate social responsibility and sustainability policies because they can threaten shareholder interests.

This article does not delve into political discussions or discuss theoretical aspects about the purpose of a company. Instead, it uses insights from the US and Europe to explain that the purpose of the company as a profit-oriented organization develops through deliberation processes. The outcome of that process may be that political action is necessary to safeguard a company's financial interests. Likewise, a social issue must sometimes be considered, regardless of the cost to the company's bottom line.

Developing a successful company requires a dialogue with the right people at the right moment and creating the right amount of tension between various interests. The organization's deliberation processes and an understanding of the responsibilities of executives drive this.

This article does not aim to defend any specific shareholder/stakeholder perspective. Rather, we discuss how companies organize deliberation processes and whether these processes enable the integration of the right stakeholder interests.

Importantly, establishing and upholding a company's purpose is not confined to grand gestures — it consists of actions and decisions both large and small. It encompasses how you greet your colleagues at the start of the day; your organization's governance structure; and the types of shareholders, clients, and suppliers in which your company engages.

DEVELOPING A SUCCESSFUL COMPANY REQUIRES A DIALOGUE WITH THE RIGHT PEOPLE AT THE RIGHT MOMENT

DELIBERATION & CORPORATE PURPOSE

The basic definition of "deliberation" (thoughtful and careful decision-making) has received a lot of attention in philosophical and religious traditions. In the US, pragmatists paid a lot of attention to deliberation processes (see sidebar "Pragmatism as an Intellectual Response to the US Civil War"). In Europe, the work of German philosopher Jürgen Habermas in the 1970s brought increased attention to deliberation.

Currently, the concept is most often seen in corporate governance. For a long time, economist Milton Friedman's assertion that the "business

PRAGMATISM AS AN INTELLECTUAL RESPONSE TO THE US CIVIL WAR

Pragmatism is a philosophy that can be seen as an intellectual response to the fierce polarization that led to the US Civil War.[1] A group of men, some with experience in the war, formed the Metaphysical Club in the 1870s to develop an approach in which experience and action were valued over dogmas and authority. They had backgrounds in law, history, theology, philosophy, and other humanities.

Pragmatists laid the foundation for American intellectual life at that time, establishing fields such as psychology (William James) and education (John Dewey). They focused on practical experience and action and were strongly inspired by social workers in US cities, where many migrants suffered from poverty.

Practitioners such as Jane Addams and Mary Parker Follet developed social practices and developed the foundation for business schools. Dewey established a primary school with Addams, welcoming various cultures and backgrounds. Follet is seen as one of the founders of management science, along with Chester Barnard.[2] The dominance of pragmatism ended in the 1950s. Its questioning attitude toward reality could not compete with the promises of positivist social science, which suggested answers to all social questions.

[1] Menand, Louis. *The Metaphysical Club: A Story of Ideas in America*. MacMillan, 2002.

[2] O'Connor, Ellen S. *Creating New Knowledge in Management: Appropriating the Field's Lost Foundations*. Stanford University Press, 2011.

of business is business" dominated economic debate.[1,2] With the Business Roundtable arguing that companies should strive for an economy that serves all Americans, governance scholars are trying to develop an alternative to Friedman.

So what are the best governance mechanisms to give a variety of stakeholders control?

Business leaders from any country can learn a lot from Europe as they seek to develop robust governance mechanisms. For example, banks in the Netherlands have never been controlled solely by private shareholders. In Dutch banks, complex deliberation systems have been developed that have been successful in the last century.[3] Employees, clients, and the government all have a role in the governance of banks.

INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY: INTEGRATION IS KEY

Chester Barnard, one of the founders of management theory, argues that integrating a variety of interests is the critical responsibility of an executive. In *The Functions of the Executive* (long a standard book at business schools), he outlines an approach to deliberation in which managers reflect on their norms and the norms of their stakeholders and then work with the stakeholders to develop these norms further.[4]

Fortunately, Barnard has been recently rediscovered, and scholars are once again looking for an integrating, normative perspective.[5] How can business school students be trained as responsible professionals who integrate various disciplines, such as finance, marketing, strategy, sales, and HR, into sustainable solutions for all?

Following Barnard, executives should develop deliberation processes in which integration of a variety of norms gets critical attention. They should focus on small things, including symbols, ideas, and gestures because they often make the company. For example, the Apple logo stands for much more than technical specifications. The values that the Apple logo stands for are visible in almost all the company's actions.

5 PRINCIPLES FOR DELIBERATION: BIG COMPANIES CONSIST OF MANY SMALL GESTURES

Aristotle pointed out that most issues don't have a clear right or wrong answer and that the difficulty is finding a path in between. For example, if we want sustainable societies, it is not good to completely forbid fossil fuels or to promote them. Instead, we must ask: how can we deal with fossil fuels so they will improve society as a whole? We face a similar conundrum when it comes to large-scale changes in business. When companies change too fast, it usually leads to serious economic problems. Similar problems occur when they do not change fast enough.

Pragmatism makes these big questions personal. We are caged in our thinking, our norms, and our experiences. Dialogue and open communication are the only approaches that enable us to develop ourselves and our society. Questioning is the gate to development because it enables us to understand our norms and those of others.

Here, small gestures can help jump-start productive discussions because they help us understand the underlying norms of various people that need to be further developed. Developing norms together enables progress. This implies significant tensions between individuals, but workable solutions must be found. When we can agree on small things, we develop this understanding toward a shared understanding of bigger issues toward a common purpose.

The following five principles can help guide deliberation about corporate purpose.

1. ENCOURAGE OPEN DIALOGUE

Successful deliberations about purpose require open dialogue. Real talk about what is important (independent of direct interests) is critical for developing a shared purpose. Everyone's opinion is worth listening to. There are no privileged positions and no experts, only reasoned ideas.

Open dialogue is only possible when we agree on certain rules. This is one of our biggest challenges. Can we listen to someone with opposing opinions and work with him or her to develop a solution that feels good? Conflict resolution requires serious interpersonal skills and deep reflection by every individual. Governance mechanisms are important here, but in the end, the people who work with them decide how they are used.

2. SUPPORT DELIBERATION WITH CORPORATE LAWS & RULES

Laws, corporate rules, and procedures should support deliberation mechanisms. For starters, that means they cannot hinder open dialogue. Beyond that, we must understand that the law is not about defending interests; rather, it should help stakeholders develop their purposes together.

Management expert Mary Parker Follet wrote: "Law cannot decide between purposes, set their various values, and secure interests. Its task is to allow full opportunity for those modes of activity from which integrating purpose may arise, and such purpose tends to secure itself. The function of law is not merely to safeguard interests; it is to help us to understand our interests, to broaden and deepen them."[6]

Follet was active in the debate about corporate governance in the 1920s, together with John Dewey. They worked to prevent a strict definition of the purpose of the company in US law because they believed it would hinder open dialogue.

It is time we take this principle in corporate law seriously again. When lawyers suggest that a CEO weigh their words carefully, real dialogue goes out the window. In Europe, there is a serious tradition of stakeholder dialogue mechanisms.[7] Works councils, advisory boards, cooperative governance structures, and foundation-owned companies all tend to allow room for deliberation and stakeholder dialogue (see Table 1[8]).

DIRECT INFLUENCE PATHWAYS	INDIRECT INFLUENCE PATHWAYS
Annual meeting of shareholders	Government regulation, statutory arrangements & regulation of supervisory authorities
Meetings of company representatives with analysts	Share price
Meetings with stock exchange authorities	Regulation of stock exchange
Meetings with works councils	Regulation (e.g., Works Councils Act, Structure Act), internal regulation, statutory arrangements; Works Council annual report
Meetings with labor unions	Agreements on working conditions, other agreements & labor laws
Performance interview	Employment contract
(Negotiations on) nomination & appointment of supervisory directors	Profile of external directors, screening by supervisory authorities
Committees of the board of supervisory directors	Corporate governance policy, regulations by governments, reports presenting advice of committees regarding corporate governance
Consulting supervisory authorities	Regulations & supervision
Client association; customer association	Articles of association of clients' association, articles of association of the company & other arrangements
Board of a cooperative	Articles of association of cooperatives & legislation regarding cooperatives
Negotiations with (major) clients & other meetings with clients (panels)	Contracts & other agreements
Negotiations with governments	Regulations & other agreements
Negotiations with & in sector associations	Covenants & other agreements

Table 1. Examples of direct and indirect influence pathways for governance mechanisms (source: De Graaf and Herkströter)

Here, direct and indirect influence pathways can be relevant. In the former, companies and stakeholders influence each other in direct dialogue. In the latter, regulation acts as an intermediary. Attention to these pathways makes clear that the purpose of the company tends to be the subject of a variety of governance mechanisms. Purpose develops in every interaction between a company and its stakeholders, not just at the annual meeting.

For example, the successful Danish pharmaceutical company Novo Nordisk is a foundation-owned company listed on the stock market. This shows it's possible to be market-driven while investing in R&D, taking social projects seriously, and making shareholders happy.

3. USE HISTORY AS A TOUCHSTONE

We can look to the past to see how individuals dealt with similar tensions before us. Current issues are rooted in historical developments — and so are the solutions.

We tend to underestimate the role of history, although many of us use earlier experiences to argue against or favor a certain solution. History is reflected in companies' economic positions. Stakeholder issues are also rooted in history, and this quickly becomes apparent during crises. Every stakeholder dialogue should start with a reflection of history. When we agree on the root cause, we can discuss solutions that could work for everyone involved.

4. LET INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY GUIDE YOU

We must be guided by our individual responsibility but able to relate to other perspectives. We cannot hide behind our role and place in society or our lawyers. We are responsible for certain tasks. We must be guided by individual responsibility and relate that to the responsibility of others. This means making choices between possible stakeholders and understanding that it is not about what your lawyer says is your responsibility but about how you develop your own responsibility.

5. BE INTEGRATIVE

Integration is the task of executives and stakeholders. This is a very personal moment: you have to integrate your feelings (negative and positive) and cognitive understandings into what you do in your daily life and connect with others. The real fun — and I would argue the fulfillment of professional life — is that after serious deliberation with stakeholders, a solution develops that promises a new future for you and your company. Deliberation processes should enable executives and corporate stakeholders to integrate their interests so that decisions are better than the individuals themselves could have thought of before the process started, rather than weak compromises.

> **STRONG DELIBERATION PROCESSES INTEGRATE VARIOUS INTERESTS, ENABLING EXECUTIVES & STAKEHOLDERS TO INTEGRATE THEIR OPINIONS**

CONCLUSION

Companies are profit-optimizing organizations. As such, they integrate the interests of a specific set of stakeholders in a specific way within deliberation processes.

The critical responsibility of executives and their non-executive board members is to organize these deliberation processes so that integration can occur, and a specific set of stakeholders can align with the corporate executives. Strong deliberation processes integrate various interests, enabling executives and stakeholders to integrate their opinions toward a new perspective of reality. This perspective enables a company to develop further.

A company is only as strong as its deliberation processes, which are unique. Novo Nordisk is different from Tesla; Patagonia is different from Shell. But all of them need strong connections with stakeholders that share some underlying values with them, and this must be properly communicated over time. Every executive must develop their own strategy, and to understand these strategies, deliberation processes should get more attention than they currently do in our polarized societies.

REFERENCES

[1] Friedman, Milton. *Capitalism and Freedom*. University of Chicago Press, 1962.

[2] Friedman, Milton. "The Social Responsibility of Business Is to Increase Its Profits." *The New York Times*, 13 September 1970.

[3] De Graaf, Frank Jan, and J.W. Stoelhorst. "The Role of Governance in Corporate Social Responsibility: Lessons from Dutch Finance." *Business & Society*, Vol. 52, No. 2, February 2010.

[4] Barnard, Chester I. *The Functions of the Executive*. Harvard University Press, 1938.

[5] O'Connor, Ellen S. *Creating New Knowledge in Management: Appropriating the Field's Lost Foundations*. Stanford University Press, 2011.

[6] Follett, Mary Parker. *Creative Experience*. Longmans, Green and Co, 1924.

[7] De Graaf, Frank J., and Cor A.J. Herkströter. "How Corporate Social Performance Is Institutionalised Within the Governance Structure: The Dutch Corporate Governance Model." *Journal of Business Ethics*, Vol. 74, January 2007.

[8] De Graaf and Herkströter (see 7).

About the author

Frank Jan de Graaf is Professor of Corporate Governance and Leadership at Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences (AUAS), the Netherlands. Dr. de Graaf is a member of the management team for the finance and accounting department at AUAS and lectures in the joint master's program with Northumbria University, UK. His research focuses on professionals, values, and purposes in financial institutions and societal organizations, including government and cultural organizations. Dr. de Graaf cofounded the Network for Sustainable Financial Markets (NSFM), and he has served as an advisor on responsible investment for various financial institutions. He has published articles in various journals, including *Journal of Business Ethics, Critical Perspectives on Accounting, UNSW Law Journal, International Journal of Pension Management, Journal of Investing, Management Decision, EFMD Global Focus*, and *Business & Society*. Dr. de Graaf earned a PhD in business economics from the University of Amsterdam, the Netherlands. He can be reached at f.j.de.graaf@hva.nl.

PURPOSE & THE PROFESSIONS

Authors
_____

Ananthi Al Ramiah, Gretchen Reydams-Schils,
and Matthew Phillips

Professionals are essential to a healthy and just modern society. The provision of crucial structures and services — ranging from health guidance and legal resolutions to high-quality infrastructure and more — relies on the expertise of professionals. Without access to these fundamental goods and services, societal growth would be significantly hindered.[1]

Professionals serve as indispensable intermediaries, whose specialized knowledge and skills grant them authority and responsibility to act in the best interests of those they serve. Their obligations extend beyond their immediate patients or clients to the broader public, encompassing justice, safety, dignity, and rights. Given their substantial social eminence and impact, some regard the roles of professionals as inherently moral.[2]

Worryingly, however, trust in professionals is declining in the general population. For example, in 2023, a representative sample of Americans rated 22 of 23 professions as less trustworthy than in 2019, with an average six-point drop, and only six of the 23 professions were rated "high/very high" in terms of honesty and ethics.[3] Equally concerning are the internal struggles of professionals, who face high rates of substance abuse, depression, stress, and suicide.[4,5] Medical and legal professionals suffer from secondary or vicarious trauma due to errors or adverse outcomes for their clients or patients.[6]

Such mistrust and distress result in part from the nature of professional education and the market economy, in which emerging professionals often have a limited understanding of the full scope of their profession's *telos* (its purpose and reason for being), which defines its ethical values, identity, responsibilities, and activities.[7] This means that emerging professionals may lack a full appreciation of the value they can create and/or miss opportunities to steward critical social systems.

How did we get here? In brief, professional education emerged from theological origins, with religious institutions playing a central role in training clergy and, by extension, shaping early education for professions such as law and medicine — even if those institutions did not always uphold these values. For generations, children followed parents into these professions, organically imbibing the profession's values and practices. Over time, as societal values shifted during the Renaissance and Enlightenment, professional education began to secularize and diversify, moving away from theological anchoring toward more specialized and scientific approaches, as well as toward more inclusive and accessible educational models, allowing a more diverse set of individuals to enter various professions.

TRUST IN PROFESSIONALS IS DECLINING IN THE GENERAL POPULATION

Despite these advancements, and possibly because of them, emerging professionals found themselves approaching the world of work with less well-formed notions of the stewardship role they play for their profession, the moral values that shape its proper practice, and the social structures with which the profession interacts and on which it depends.[8]

ARE WE LOSING THE MORAL HIGH GROUND?

In an effort to fill that gap and provide students with a more well-formed understanding of their professional role and responsibilities, professional schools have for decades taught classes in professional ethics, which tend to cover crucial ethical standards, principles, and codes of conduct.

Rules, while essential, are insufficient for navigating the complexities of real-world ethical dilemmas because they may not address nuanced situations or evolving societal expectations. True ethical professionalism requires a deeper commitment to reflective practice and moral reasoning, as well as ongoing engagement with the broader impact of one's professional decisions. Moreover, professional relationships are often formed in times of vulnerability (e.g., ill health, legal quandaries). A good professional acts competently, fulfilling responsibilities, maintaining confidentiality, and making choices in the best interests of those whose life outcomes depend on their professional expertise and judgment.[9]

This dependability is especially necessary in situations involving conflicting interests or uncertainties. Professionals operate within contexts of extraordinary complexity. Legal experts must navigate evolving systems and unpredictable actors. Engineers must adapt to unexpected occurrences and consider frequent feedback to create robust designs. In medicine, professionals must account for multifaceted patient factors within diverse contexts, requiring a holistic view of biological, psychological, and social interactions.

Codes of conduct cannot fully address the demands and nuances of such complexity. Claiming otherwise or oversimplifying the issue leaves professionals ill-equipped to navigate the intricate, unpredictable, high-stakes challenges they face.

We advocate for a virtue-oriented approach to complement existing codes of conduct. As the authors of *Virtue Ethics and Professional Roles* assert, a lasting sense of professional identity is undeniably based on virtue.[10] The impetus for a virtuous professional identity arises from a deep and collectively held sense of professional purpose. And sustaining that sense of professional

purpose so that it can act as a North Star requires professionals to have an identity founded on seeing themselves as important moral actors who are essential to human flourishing.

Additionally, we believe that a robust professional purpose must be accompanied by the capacity to feel joy in one's professional pursuits. The inability to do so is likely to lead to the stress and suffering discussed earlier, including burnout. Although discussing joy in the context of professional purpose may seem unconventional, it is central to a virtue ethics approach. It is important to note that the purpose of life, according to the Stoics and other ancient Greek philosophers, is *eudaimonia*, commonly translated as "happiness" or "joy." *Eudaimonia* is the state of fulfillment, of possessing a good soul or having one's reason function optimally, with virtue as the essential component. As we discussed earlier, virtue is crucial to developing an appropriate professional identity. Philosopher Christopher Gill describes virtue as "expertise in leading a happy life."[11]

The four cardinal virtues that Stoicism also promotes (wisdom, courage, justice, and temperance) are fundamental principles guiding ethical behavior in personal and professional life. We believe that Stoicism offers an extremely relevant virtue ethics framework for the discussion of professional purpose and identity.

STOIC ETHICS FOR MORAL MODERN PROFESSIONALS

In a nutshell, Stoicism advocates for an expanded sense of self, in which people broaden their sphere of concern and action. The virtuous person fosters understanding and interconnectedness, thus reducing the emotional and relational distance between themselves and others.

This attitude is akin to the modern social psychological concept of "inclusion of other in self," in which a person's sphere of interest, affection, and commitment extends to significant others and even to entire groups beyond their immediate circle.[12,13] The Stoic Hierocles offered a useful visual representation of such a self: a person located within ever-broadening concentric circles representing social groups all the way up to the dimension of the universe-city or cosmopolis.

In a business context, an understanding of the self as embedded in various layers of society, combined with an appreciation of our shared humanity and responsibility to one another, can have profound implications for how a businessperson sees themselves in relation to their myriad stakeholders. Similarly, a doctor or lawyer would benefit from seeing their scope of influence extending beyond the patient/client directly in front of them, to one that includes an examination of systems and structures that are responsible for poor health outcomes, on the one hand, and injustice, on the other.

BEYOND ARISTOTLE

Aristotle's impact on modern virtue ethics highlights the critical importance of childhood development and social influences on ethical character formation through habituation, but he offers minimal explicit ethical guidance. Contemporary thinkers echo this focus on social context.[14,15]

We turn to Stoicism to provide a different perspective because it puts an emphasis on ethical growth during early adulthood. Stoics believe everyone has inherent capacities for ethical development that can be aided by formal philosophical (moral) instruction and regular practice in adulthood, even if one's upbringing did not reflect these values.

Stoics can inform a virtue ethics approach to the professions in several ways. First, Stoicism emphasizes a cosmopolitan perspective, seeing individuals as citizens of the universe rather than just a city-state. This broader view aligns well with the globally interconnected nature of modern life while acknowledging the importance of local and personal commitments.

Second, unlike Aristotle, who saw a tension between the contemplative and active components of life, Stoicism sees contemplative and active modes as complementary. The Stoics argued that a person should not seek a state of pure detachment but should engage in his or her jobs, roles, and activities with a virtuous motivation, constantly correcting traditional values such as success and profit by weighing them against those prescribed by virtue (which prioritize the common good).[16]

Thus, virtues should be implemented within specific communities and roles, recognizing multiple intersecting identities.[17] For the Stoic Panaetius, as reported by Cicero in *On Duties*, these include our common human nature, individual talents, social roles, and chosen careers, and he advised that we should mediate between and harmonize these roles to achieve virtue-based happiness.[18]

Perhaps the greatest value to modern professionals comes from the Stoic concept of the "mediating self." Coined by this paper's coauthor, Gretchen Reydams-Schils, a scholar who works on Stoicism, this notion reminds professionals that the self is not only socially and cosmically embedded, it is continuously reassessing values and roles.[19] This view would allow professionals to strive for the ideal while remaining firmly grounded in reality.

THE MEDIATING SELF

Stoicism promotes virtuous judgments and actions that transcend narrow self-interest, and at the heart of this expansive understanding of the self is the notion that our social and cosmic embeddedness provides the basis for our human interactions and choices. In this way, Stoicism sees both the contemplative and active lives as essential for achieving a virtuous and fulfilling existence.

Modern professionals occupy roles that require judgment beyond their ethical codes, as in the case of a lawyer balancing duties to clients and the court or a businessperson balancing fiduciary responsibilities to shareholders, employees, customers, and the environment. Their professional identity is unified yet multifaceted, integrating distinct but interrelated responsibilities to fulfill their roles ethically and effectively. The concept of the mediating self helps professionals navigate their various roles and situational demands, balancing between the cosmic or ideal and the local or imperfect.

The Stoic philosopher Seneca asserts that while virtue is indivisible, its application varies with the context.[20] A Stoic framework acknowledges prevailing norms while promoting critical reevaluation of these norms when they do not support the good. When professionals find that norms conflict with their goals or the people they serve, they should turn inward for strength and outward to find moral exemplars to bring about necessary positive changes.[21]

In the context of Stoic cosmopolitanism, the mediating self that navigates existing (and often misguided) norms helps ensure modern professionals can perform their duties with the right motivations and dispositions.

CAN PROFIT BE VIRTUOUS?

Most professionals operate within a profit-driven context, which creates an intrinsic tension between maximizing profit and ethical conduct. This tension is especially significant in market economies and the private sector, where profit is a defining feature.

Yet philosophically speaking, profit and virtue need not be at odds, and Stoicism does not reject wealth per se. It views certain externals, such as wealth, as "preferred indifferents" (i.e., one can pursue these as long as they do not conflict with the good, strictly defined as virtue). The challenge arises in how profit is valued and pursued within organizations. When profit is prioritized excessively at the expense of ethical considerations, it undermines a virtuous professional identity. Stoicism encourages us to assess the true utility of profit and its alignment with virtuous living.

Effective ethical development helps professionals balance "preferred indifferents" with their societal roles, professional goals, and the interests of various stakeholders. This shift from short-term gains to sustainable, long-term value creation requires recognizing the social dimension and applying practical deliberation. A virtuous professional in a profit-oriented context should adopt a tempered and courageous approach, understanding that profit is not the sole metric of success.[22] Instead, virtues should guide decision-making, leading to a more comprehensive view of business success. Practicing generosity, justice, and temperance in managing and distributing wealth ensures it benefits the greater good rather than fostering self-indulgence.[23]

Take YKK, a multinational company guided by the Japanese philosophy of the "Cycle of Goodness" and the motto "No one prospers without rendering benefit to others." YKK exemplifies virtues such as wisdom and temperance by making informed decisions that consider long-term impacts on all stakeholders. It balances business growth with social and environmental responsibility through sustainable practices, innovative products, and a commitment to quality. YKK's dedication to fairness and equity is reflected in its establishment of company-wide virtuous behavioral principles and its treatment of employees and suppliers.

Earthjustice is a nonprofit environmental law organization known for its litigation and advocacy. Its tagline, "Because the Earth needs a good lawyer," reflects its commitment to justice and indicates its courage to confront boldly environmental threats. This approach aligns with Stoic ideals of ethical conduct and dedication to the common good.

HOW TO

The Stoics had practical strategies for developing and fortifying character. We offer three Stoic practices as a starting point for nurturing a virtue-grounded professional identity that can help professionals deal with uncertainty, complexity, and negative emotions:

1. Stoic philosophers such as Marcus Aurelius, Seneca, and Epictetus practiced negative visualization, or *praemeditatio malorum* (premeditation of evils), as a form of pre-exposure to potential problems. This practice helped them reduce their sensitivity and impulsive reactions to shocking and difficult circumstances.[24] Although anticipating future hardships might seem unpalatable, the Stoics recommended it to maintain discipline and virtue in responding to unexpected and painful circumstances. This practice and resulting mindset would greatly benefit professionals working under extreme time pressure with resource constraints, complex systems, and high stakes for both themselves and the people they serve. It would aid in professional identity formation because people would develop a sense of themselves as proactive rather than solely reactive. The Stoics famously did not dwell on negative emotions. They did, however, take failures and disappointment seriously, rather than ignoring, avoiding, trivializing, or negatively internalizing them.

2. Marcus Aurelius, in *Meditations*, practices a form of regular reflection, taking time to assess one's actions and thoughts.[25] This practice is aimed at uncovering behavioral and cognitive patterns, fostering personal growth, and continuously improving one's moral character. Seneca regularly engaged in self-examination at night. Approaching these rituals with honesty, discipline, and a focus on professional purpose (combined with an acceptance of one's diverse roles) can enhance decision-making and leadership. Reflective meditations are particularly valuable for understanding how one implicitly prioritizes various "indifferents" in relation to virtue and the ways this prioritization was reflected in one's actions and choices that day. A reflective pause at the end of each day allows for a realignment of those values (if necessary), in accordance with one's professional purpose and identity. One's sense of purpose and identity are also reinvigorated and renewed through such reflections, thereby retaining their North Star–like quality in challenging times.

3. Stoic expert Nancy Sherman describes a useful analogy employed by the Stoics: an archer's objective is to hit the bullseye, but her ultimate goal is to strive earnestly to achieve that objective.[26] In other words, the archer pursues two related but distinct values: the specific objective of hitting the target and the broader goal of diligent, wholehearted effort. The objective, while preferred, is ultimately indifferent, whereas the ultimate goal (embodying the virtue of striving) is crucial for a fulfilling life. This distinction is particularly relevant for professionals facing significant uncertainty and high stakes. Excellence in one's role, achieved with competence and an understanding of its social value, fulfills professional purpose, even if specific outcomes fall short. As Sherman notes, "Excellence doesn't bring immunity from failure or suffering … from moral distress. But it is a source of psychological sustenance of a profound sort."[27] Being clear-eyed about objectives and goals helps one to accept losses gracefully and to forge ahead with purpose and joy.

PRACTICE MAKES STOIC

The Stoics emphasized a deliberate approach to self-awareness and decision-making that involved rigorous practice. Their emphasis on practice was the result of their understanding that many decisions are automatic, a phenomenon later explored by psychologist and author Daniel Kahneman: our rapid-thinking system often overshadows slower, more thoughtful processes and is a fundamental aspect of human nature.[28] To make rationality central to decision-making, we must train and condition it to become readily accessible and usable. Such training is essential not only for mitigating implicit biases, but also for fostering more thoughtful and mature decision-making in complex situations.

Consistent practice and prioritization are crucial, but emphasis on professional identity formation is often lacking in professional school curriculums. Integrating this approach is challenging due to market pressures for shorter degree timelines and intense job competition. However, cultivating a virtue-based professional identity grounded in a strong sense of professional purpose is essential for nurturing and retaining outstanding professionals throughout their careers.

We recommend that professional schools creatively adjust their curricula to prioritize this purpose-driven, virtue-based development. This shift requires not only different knowledge and skill sets from instructors, but also a change in mindset from students and a structural change in the way such programs are set up. Achieving this goal will take time and sustained effort, and it will be more likely to happen if professional organizations prefer graduates with these qualities. Ongoing professional formation, peer reflection, and periodic reorienting toward these values within professional communities will also be key to long-term success.

CONCLUSION

In a landscape of professional work characterized by increasing complexity and market pressures, Stoic principles offer a valuable framework for emphasizing virtue, self-awareness, and moral responsibility. Stoicism's focus on cosmopolitanism and the self as embedded within broader social and cosmic contexts provides a robust foundation for understanding the multifaceted roles professionals play.

Professional schools must adapt their curricula to foster this virtue-based approach, recognizing that ethical conduct extends beyond adherence to codes of practice. This shift requires both structural changes in educational programming and a cultural transformation within professional communities. Emphasizing continuous reflection, training in virtue, and a commitment to the broader social impact of professional actions can significantly enhance trust, well-being, and effectiveness in the profession.

By prioritizing the development of a purpose-driven, virtue-based professional identity, we envision a future where professionals thrive in their roles and uphold the highest standards of ethical excellence.

REFERENCES

[1] Oakley, Justin, and Dean Cocking. *Virtue Ethics and Professional Roles*. Cambridge University Press, 2001.

[2] Davis, Michael. "The Special Role of Professionals in Business Ethics." *Business and Professional Ethics Journal*, Vol. 7, No. 2, January 1988.

[3] Brenan, Megan, and Jeffrey M. Jones. "Honesty/Ethics in Professions." Gallup, accessed September 2024.

[4] Weiner, Stacy. "Out of the Shadows: Physicians Share Their Mental Health Struggles." Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC), 28 March 2023.

[5] Krill, Patrick R., Ryan Johnson, and Linda Albert. "The Prevalence of Substance Use and Other Mental Health Concerns Among American Attorneys." *Journal of Addiction Medicine*, Vol. 10, No. 1, February 2016.

[6] Hilfiker, David. "Facing Our Mistakes." *The New England Journal of Medicine*, Vol. 310, No. 2, January 1984.

[7] Oakley and Cocking (see 1).

[8] Otteson, James R. *Honorable Business: A Framework for Business in a Just and Humane Society*. Oxford University Press, 2019.

[9] Hawley, Katherine. *Trust: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press, 2012.

[10] Oakley and Cocking (see 1).

[11] Gill, Christopher. *Learning to Live Naturally: Stoic Ethics and Its Modern Significance*. Oxford University Press, 2022.

[12] Aron, A., et al. "Close Relationships as Including Other in the Self." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 60, No. 2, 1991.

[13] Tropp, Linda R., and Stephen C. Wright. "Ingroup Identification as the Inclusion of Ingroup in the Self." *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, Vol. 27, No. 5, May 2001.

[14] MacIntyre, Alasdair. *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*. Third edition. Notre Dame Press, 2007.

[15] Williams, Bernard. "Acting as the Virtuous Person Acts." In *Aristotle and Moral Realism*, edited by Robert Heinaman. Routledge, 1996.

[16] Seneca, Lucius Annaeus. *Letters on Ethics*. University of Chicago Press, 2015.

[17] Gill (see 11).

[18] Cicero. *On Duties*. Harvard University Press, 1913.

[19] Reydams-Schils, Gretchen. *The Roman Stoics: Self, Responsibility, and Affection*. University of Chicago Press, 2005.

[20] Seneca (see 16).

[21] Reydams-Schils (see 19).

[22] Mayer, Cokin. *Prosperity: Better Business Makes the Greater Good*. Oxford University Press, 2018.

[23] Hartman, Edwin M. "Virtue, Profit, and the Separation Thesis: An Aristotelian View." *Journal of Business Ethics*, Vol. 99, January 2011.

[24] Sherman, Nancy. *Stoic Wisdom: Ancient Lessons for Modern Resilience*. Oxford University Press, 2021.

[25] Aurelius, Marcus. *Meditations.* Penguin Books, 2005.

[26] Sherman (see 24).

[27] Sherman (see 24).

[28] Kahneman, Daniel. *Thinking, Fast and Slow*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011.

About the authors

Ananthi Al Ramiah is a Social Psychologist and Executive-in-Residence at Ivey Business School, Western University, Canada. Previously, she served as Director of Research and Strategic Integration at Wake Forest University's Program for Leadership and Character in the Professional Schools. Dr. Ramiah's interdisciplinary work bridges social psychology, economics, and philosophy, with experience in research, teaching, and consulting across academia, the public sector, and NGOs in the UK, Southeast Asia, and the US. Her research has been published in various outlets, including *American Psychologist, Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, and *The Oxford Handbook of Political Psychology*. Dr. Ramiah earned a PhD from the University of Oxford, UK. She can be reached at ananthi.ramiah@googlemail.com.

Gretchen Reydams-Schils is Professor in the Program of Liberal Studies at the University of Notre Dame and holds concurrent appointments in Classics, Philosophy, and Theology. Dr. Reydams-Schils specializes in Greek and Roman philosophy and is known for her work on the social ethics of the Stoics. She is the author of *The Roman Stoics: Self, Responsibility, and Affection* and is a 2024 Guggenheim Fellow. Dr. Reydams-Schils earned a PhD from the University of California, Berkeley. She can be reached at reydams-schils.1@nd.edu.

Matthew T. Phillips is Teaching Professor of Business Law and Ethics and the Exxon-Calloway Faculty Fellow at Wake Forest University School of Business. He currently serves as Associate Provost for Strategic Initiatives. Mr. Phillips designed and directed the "Purpose and Ethics" course, which marks the beginning of every MBA student's journey. An earlier version of this course earned recognition from the Aspen Institute. Mr. Phillips earned a master of divinity degree from Duke University and a juris doctor degree from Wake Forest University. He can be reached at phillimt@wfu.edu.

EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED:

ORGANIZATIONAL PURPOSE AS ENABLER OF SERENDIPITOUS IMPACT

Authors

Christian Busch and Nele Terveen

Today's workforce seeks meaningful employment, customers demand sustainable and transparent products, and investors expect companies to perform well financially while contributing positively to society.[1,2] This requires alignment across the organization, based on a clear organizational purpose that is integrated across the organization. For instance, Patagonia's mission to "save our home planet" aligns with its sustainable practices, influencing its entire supply chain. Similarly, Unilever's "Sustainable Living Plan" initially aimed to decouple the company's growth from its environmental footprint while increasing its positive social impact.

However, for organizational purpose to transcend superficial rhetoric and fulfill promises of engaged employees and loyal customers, companies must continuously and accurately assess the (intended and unintended) outcomes of their strategies. This ability is often missing. For example, while Starbucks supports initiatives such as ethical sourcing, it must measure the long-term social and environmental impacts of these initiatives, as well as its day-to-day operations, to truly validate its stated ideals.

In this article, we first discuss best practices around developing, assessing, and systematizing corporate impact then elaborate on the importance of developing purpose-driven structures and processes that allow the unexpected to be integrated toward what we call "Serendipitous Impact."

EXPECTED IMPACT

As organizations set specific, purpose-driven goals, there is a temptation to focus exclusively on new initiatives and their impacts (e.g., dodgy carbon offsets to achieve climate goals). However, it is particularly important to understand the entire organization's impact and identify potential negative effects and unintended negative externalities of existing operations. Consider Uber, which aims to make transportation reliable for everyone. It has revolutionized ride-hailing, but it must also address socioeconomic challenges faced by its drivers, such as job insecurity and lack of benefits.

Organizations often measure their positive societal contributions by the amount they invest in "good works." Shifting from merely measuring inputs (resources invested) to measuring outputs or outcomes is necessary but challenging. For instance, Microsoft's "AI for Good" initiative tracks the number of projects it funds, but it should also assess tangible outcomes, such as the impact on environmental sustainability or healthcare improvements. Similarly, bold corporate statements about climate neutrality through offsetting often fall short of concrete effects on carbon emissions.

> **COMPANIES MUST CONTINUOUSLY & ACCURATELY ASSESS THE (INTENDED & UNINTENDED) OUTCOMES OF THEIR STRATEGIES**

It is crucial to determine the extent of an organization's contributions to these results, as well as possible positive or negative secondary effects. If Google's sustainability efforts are supposed to reduce carbon footprints, for example, it is essential to measure both the direct impacts and the potential ripple effects on the broader tech industry and connected communities.

Disentangling the causal relationship between an organization's activities and its effects can be difficult, particularly for long-term outcomes. One solution is for organizations to start measuring outputs that have a reasonable correlation with desired outcomes — they often are directly related to an organization's efforts, and the data is often internally available (e.g., number of people fed). In contrast, outcomes like "improving food security" often require external information such as polling community members and tracking over time.

As organizations become serious about measuring the impact of their purpose, they need an infrastructure for collecting and tracking impact data. For example, SAP's Green Token aims to provide an infrastructure connecting battery producers, automotive suppliers, and battery-recycling start-ups (a new approach to circular battery loops). It provides a material account that creates a digital representation of an electric vehicle battery (scrap or end-of-life) to black mass, which is then split into separate components such as lithium and cobalt, enabled by wet chemical processes.[3]
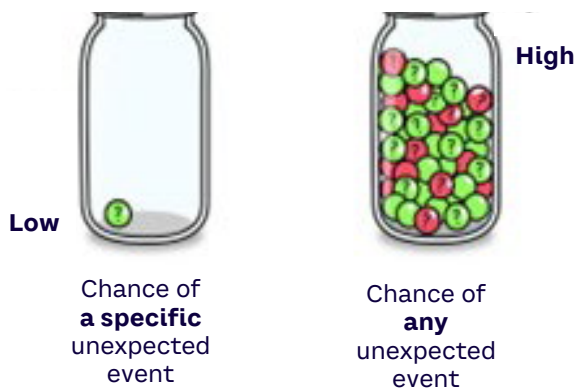
Orchestrating such processes for data on outputs and outcomes can potentially validate an organization's efforts and inform management dashboards and decision support systems. Some organizations use sustainability data to improve energy efficiency across their supply chain, aligning daily operations with long-term sustainability goals.

However, impactful solutions often emerge unexpectedly, necessitating a dynamic approach to a company's understanding of its impact.

EXPECTING THE UNEXPECTED

Navigating a world full of unexpected events requires maintaining a long-term vision while being open to the unexpected and adjusting accordingly. Ajay Banga, former CEO of Mastercard, spearheaded an effort to bring 500 million people who were previously unbanked into the financial system, but he clarified that if parts of the strategy did not work locally, the company would have to adjust it, opening it up to meaningful (social) innovations along the way.

That's important because the unexpected is very likely, as Figure 1 illustrates. The chance of a specific unexpected event is low, but if you add up all possible unexpected events, it becomes highly likely that something unexpected will occur (e.g., an unexpected solution to a social or environmental challenge).

Therefore, successful leaders combine vision with adaptability, aligning short-term actions with long-term goals.[4,5] This balance is crucial for navigating today's complex business environment to leverage unexpected events.

SERENDIPITOUS IMPACT

Traditional strategies often fail to address the complexities of societal and environmental issues, which often do not have solutions a priori. Rather, they emerge along the way in collaboration with partners. Unexpected events and crises can trigger positive unintended outcomes; that is, Serendipitous Impact.

Low — Chance of **a specific** unexpected event

High — Chance of **any** unexpected event

Figure 1. Expect the unexpected

This impact occurs within the broader purpose field of the organization: although the exact impact is impossible to specify due to an ever-changing environment with limited information, direct integration of unexpected events into an organization's core practices allows it to create impact without derailing its overall purpose.

The success of RLabs, an organization in Cape Town, South Africa, Cape Flats district, exemplifies this approach. Operating in a setting characterized by extreme uncertainty, RLabs turns crises into impactful innovation by creative use of limited resources. RLabs started out connecting residents needing emotional support via mobile phones. Over time, it evolved to offer training in social media and entrepreneurship, fostering hope by offering high-quality, low-cost education and creating related job opportunities.

This approach of leveraging what was at hand locally included integrating previously unemployable individuals to become teachers and using old garages as training centers —shifting its community's focus from deficiencies to potential. This enabled people to make unexpected positive discoveries (serendipity, aka "smart luck"), as social and educational barriers were being removed, allowing people to continuously turn unexpected events into opportunities instead of being rigidly focused on a particular way of doing things. For example, when the pandemic meant that physical courses couldn't be taught, RLabs began teaching short "nano courses." The purpose (enabling hope

by delivering high-quality, low-cost education) stayed the same, but the strategy and related impact emerged serendipitously.

Serendipity (making unexpected positive discoveries) involves the interaction of unexpected events and human action. Organizational members need to learn to identify unexpected opportunities, especially in crisis moments, and turn them into positive outcomes. That way, an unexpected event (e.g., the pandemic), based on a clear purpose (enabling local communities to get high-quality education access), can turn into a serendipitous outcome (nano courses).

Figure 2 shows five core practices that help organizations proceed from purpose-driven leadership to Serendipitous Impact: impact mission, impact leadership, impact governance, impact networks, and impact measurement.[6]

5 PRACTICES

Purpose-driven leadership cultivates Serendipitous Impact by turning unforeseen events into strategic opportunities (see Figure 2):[7]

1. **Impact mission.** Successful organizations define a clear "why" that guides their actions, continuously refining related strategies to align with emerging needs and demands. Establishing an effective impact mission requires continuously engaging stakeholders to understand their needs
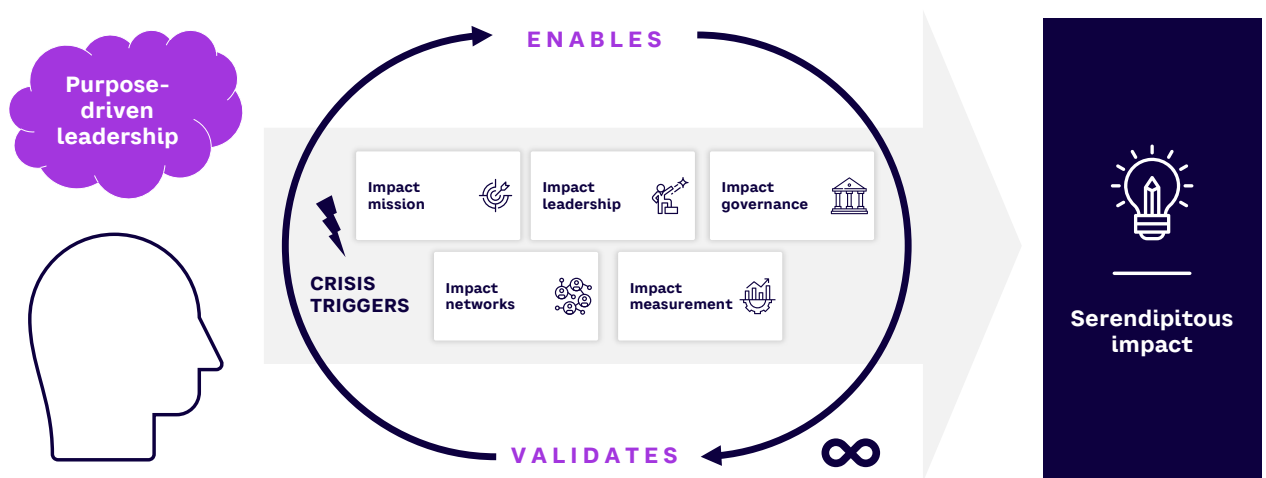

Figure 2. Serendipitous Impact Framework

and expectations, incorporating their feedback to adapt and evolve, and communicating related emerging strategies effectively to inspire and motivate employees. United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and other frameworks are available to help organizations understand relevant societal issues. In the case of RLabs, the overarching mission that emerged in close collaboration with its stakeholders is to "reconstruct communities through innovation, technology, and education."

2. **Impact leadership.** Cultivating adaptable leaders across all levels and embedded in the respective community is essential for driving impact based on emerging needs. It starts with providing ongoing leadership development and training and encouraging a culture of continuous learning. RLabs focus is on "champions," in which multiple generations of local leaders work together to allow the transfer of explicit and implicit knowledge. Organizations can use simulations to immerse their leaders in realistic, high-pressure scenarios that can teach them to handle crises effectively.[8]

3. **Impact governance.** Establishing robust governance structures improves transparency, accountability, and ethical decision-making. Here, an organization sets both long- and short-term goals and continuously assesses global and local contexts to align them. Transparency builds trust and helps companies focus on their mission while adapting to the unexpected. Successful leaders respond to the unexpected through a collaborative structure that empowers local experts while holding leadership at all levels accountable through transparent processes.[9] Embedding in local communities and empowering local champions helped RLabs quickly pivot to nano courses during the pandemic.

4. **Impact networks.** Building and leveraging high-efficacy networks enhances resilience and collective impact. This can include partnerships with local organizations, such as nongovernmental organizations, local governments, and local businesses. Setting clear, measurable long-term goals with partners that are aligned with your short-term goals sets a roadmap for sustained progress and transparency. Adapting feedback from multiple stakeholders and networks to iterate and refine strategies further improves the organization's ability to achieve its mission within its broader ecosystem, becoming more resilient toward unexpected crises. RLabs works with local universities and partners to continuously align and scale its impact goals (adjusted to its local context), using simple rules (heuristics) to scale its approach.

5. **Impact measurement.** Developing metrics and frameworks to assess and communicate impact is crucial, as discussed above. Using simple, practical guidelines for budgeting and resource allocation is essential for regularly assessing and reporting on social and environmental impact. The Science Based Targets initiative (SBTi), for instance, provides standards, tools, and guidance to set greenhouse gas–reduction targets in line with what is necessary to keep global warming below catastrophic levels and achieve net zero emissions by 2050. SBTi uses data and analytics to inform decision-making, drive improvements, and improve long-term decision-making and strategic foresight.[10] RLabs uses simple yet effective measures to understand community well-being locally, establishing additional legitimacy in the process.

CONCLUSION

Purpose helps leaders connect the dots between grand challenges, unexpected demands, and strategic responses. When purpose-driven leaders expect the unexpected, they incent their stakeholders to embrace uncertainty and guide their organizations through adversity and disruption. By adopting the five practices outlined in our Serendipitous Impact Framework, purpose-driven leaders can reframe crises into opportunities to innovate and create impactful solutions that often cannot be fully defined in advance.

REFERENCES

[1] Busch, Christian, and Lisa Hehenberger. "How to Evaluate the Impact of Corporate Purpose." *MIT Sloan Management Review*, 27 July 2022.

[2] Tsang, Patrick. "How Sustainability-Driven Enterprises Can Build a Better Future." World Economic Forum, 28 June 2023.

[3] "SAP Green Token." SAP, accessed September 2024.

4 Busch, Christian. *The Serendipity Mindset: The Art and Science of Creating Good Luck*. Riverhead Books, 2020.

5 Busch, Christian. "Towards a Theory of Serendipity: A Systematic Review and Conceptualization." *Journal of Management Studies*, Vol. 61, No. 3, November 2022.

6 Busch, Christian. "Toward an Enlightened Form of Capitalism: The Changing Role of Private Organizations in the Context of Global Affairs." In *The Future of Global Affairs: Managing Discontinuity, Disruption and Destruction*, edited by Christopher Ankersen and Waheguru Pal Singh Sidhu. Palgrave MacMillan, 2021.

7 Busch (see 6).

8 These can involve creating simulated environments where leaders can practice decision-making and problem-solving skills under stress, followed by validation of their impact through feedback and analysis by experienced experts. Grounded in historical events or plausible future scenarios, these simulations can incorporate multimedia elements such as audio recordings, video footage, and interactive decision points. During immersive training sessions, leaders engage with the simulations in real time, evoking genuine emotional responses and fostering deeper understanding. Small group discussions and immediate feedback refine decision-making processes. A post-simulation analysis by experienced experts allows for deeper reflection of experiences and actions, considering intended and unintended consequences of the impact created. For an example, see: Raval, Anjli. "Crisis Simulations Force Executives to Make Better Decisions Under Stress." *Financial Times*, 21 July 2024.

9 Companies increasingly use certifications such as B Corp to emphasize transparency, accountability, and ethical decision-making. The B Impact Assessment tool helps companies align their goals with global and local contexts by evaluating their impact on workers, communities, the environment, and customers. B Corps must amend their legal documents to commit to B Corp principles, reinforcing accountability. When implemented effectively, this commitment goes beyond mere signaling to provide greater transparency and inclusion.

10 "Standards and Guidance." Science Based Targets, accessed September 2024.

About the authors

Christian Busch is Associate Professor of Clinical Management and Organizations at the USC Marshall School of Business. His research focuses on purpose-driven leadership, sustainable innovation, and serendipity. Dr. Busch is author of *The Serendipity Mindset: The Art & Science of Creating Good Luck* and has been published widely in journals such as *Strategic Management Journal, Journal of Management Studies, Harvard Business Review*, and *MIT Sloan Management Review*. He has also been featured in *The Financial Times, Forbes*, and the BBC. Previously, Dr. Busch taught at New York University and the London School of Economics (LSE). He cofounded Leaders on Purpose and Sandbox Network and is former Co-Director of LSE's Innovation Lab. He is a member of the World Economic Forum's Expert Forum, a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts, and on the Thinkers50 Radar list of the management thinkers "most likely to shape the future." Dr. Busch earned a PhD in management, entrepreneurship, social networks, and inclusive innovation from LSE. He can be reached at christian.busch@marshall.usc.edu.

Nele Terveen is Visiting Fellow at Stanford University and an incoming Assistant Professor (Lecturer) in Innovation & Strategy at the University of Auckland, New Zealand. Her research examines complex problem-solving, serendipity, and innovation as well as ideation processes in the sustainability domain. Dr. Terveen is a dedicated researcher with time spent at HEC Paris and Harvard Kennedy School and drives social and economic transformation at the intersection of science and practice. She was invited to speak in the European Parliament for the Green Pioneers, is a Fellow in the Think Tank of the Club of Rome Germany, and serves as a jury member of the Green Startup Program of Deutsche Bundesstiftung Umwelt. Dr. Terveen is also an ambassador of the Economy for the Common Good. She earned a PhD in sustainable entrepreneurship from TU Munich, Germany. She can be reached at terveen@stanford.edu.

PURPOSE-DRIVEN SYSTEMS CHANGE

Authors
_____

Lara Liboni, Luciana O. Cezarino, Alessandro Goulart, Vera Goulart, and Rafael Petry

Our society faces profound challenges that demand urgent collective action. Issues such as accelerating climate change, deepening inequality, and biodiversity loss are rooted in an anthropocentric economic paradigm. More than incremental changes are required: a systems-change approach is necessary to target the underlying causes and structural components embedded within societal, organizational, and ecological systems. Systems change involves transformative processes that reshape these infrastructures to achieve more equitable and sustainable outcomes.[1]

When pursuing systems change, problems are identified by many interactions, associations, and nonlinear dynamics.[2] These interactions are based on a complex set of relationships between several stakeholders.

Purpose emerges from a dynamic interplay of personal experiences, values, beliefs, and aspirations.[3] Rooted in core values and shaped by significant life experiences that provide direction and meaning, individual purpose is nurtured by relationships, community involvement, and the desire to contribute to something greater than oneself.

Purpose not only serves as a foundational principle, it can also energize systems change. In this article, we describe how a coalition of stakeholders successfully enacted purpose-driven systems change in the Global South.

The Symbiosis Project iteratively refined its founders' purpose by cycling between their roles as investigators of problems and stewards of solutions.[4] It then scaffolded purpose for many stakeholders, by looping them from partners to protagonists and from protagonists to individuals (see Figure 1).

PURPOSE NOT ONLY SERVES AS A FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLE, IT CAN ALSO ENERGIZE SYSTEM CHANGE

INVESTIGATORS OF PROBLEMS

The Symbiosis Project began with two technology entrepreneurs wishing to tackle one of the most pressing challenges in emerging economies: access to and quality of higher education.

After selling their IT business, Alessandro and Vera Goulart, partners in life and business and coauthors of this article, refocused on societal impact. Determined to enact significant changes in the education system, they pursued master's degrees to thoroughly investigate the issue of limited access to higher education and the inadequacy of workforce skills in Brazil.
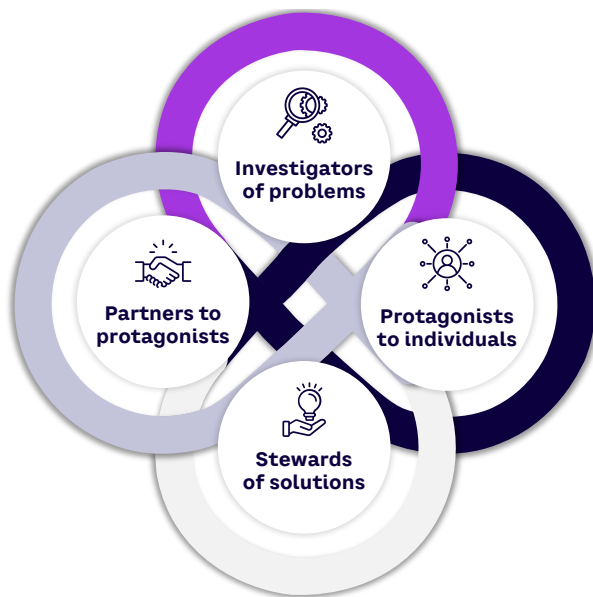
Figure 1. Principles of the Symbiosis Project

The Goularts came to understand that Brazil's higher education system was highly exclusive: it favored students who had received high-quality elementary education, which was usually provided by private institutions. Generally, higher education institutions failed to offer opportunities to vulnerable students, reducing the number of qualified professionals. At the same time, IT companies frequently complained about the gap between the technical skills being taught by higher education institutions and the practical skills needed in the business world.[5] Post hire, many companies complained about employees' lack of social and emotional skills, which they considered a major barrier to professional growth.

The Goularts realized that a lack of access to higher education, low-quality higher education, and low levels of social and emotional skills were interacting in complex ways that made each harder to solve. They understood that systems change was needed to simultaneously promote inclusion, align educational outcomes with market demands, and cultivate adaptive, socially conscious professionals.

Alessandro explained that changing the system required much more than simply teaching technology. As investigators of the problem, the Goularts framed their purpose as preparing young people to use their talent and acquired technical skills to conquer their dreams without giving up their ethical values or a desire to contribute to society.

STEWARDS OF SOLUTIONS

In 2017, the Goularts founded an innovative higher education institution in São Paulo, Brazil, called SPTech. They focused on a crucial aspect of academic training: ensuring that students were ready to apply their knowledge in real-world work environments.

Recognizing that supporting students in their transition to the job market was key to providing access to higher education, SPTech partnered with businesses that would co-create the curriculum and offer internship placements for all students entering their second term. Alessandro pointed out that "involving other stakeholders from the beginning was crucial, as it fostered ownership and ensured that diverse perspectives were considered."

From the start, the Symbiosis Project aimed to create an environment that stimulated practice-oriented learning. Several IT companies that were keenly interested in enhancing the skills of professionals in the area committed to partner with the project. Starting in their second year, students would be hired by partner companies, allowing them to learn on the job while paying for their education.

Each company committed to supporting a specific number of students. The first year was financed by SPTech for all students, to ensure access to higher education. After that, partner companies would pay the students directly. By ensuring employment and fair remuneration for all students beginning with an internship at the end of the first year, they empowered the students to invest in their education.

SPTech's high-quality education program changed the system by providing accessible higher education aligned with market demands, preparing students for careers in the tech industry and offering pathways into employment.

To address the issue of students' lack of socio-emotional skills, SPTech created a comprehensive socio-emotional education and character-training program focused on reflection, self-awareness, and personal growth. Vera, a scholar of character leadership and organizational psychology, created the curriculum. Using coaching, journaling, immersive experiences, and other approaches, SPTech helps students achieve a social and emotional maturity level that distinguishes them from other technology professionals entering the job market.

Thanks to a close relationship with students and a deep understanding of their skills and personality traits, the socio-emotional faculty team can successfully match students with partner companies. This gradual screening process ensures an optimal fit between the student and the company, minimizing mismatches with the company's culture, expectations, and characteristics.

Coauthor Rafael Petry, another member of the Symbiosis Project, played a vital role by code-signing practice-oriented projects with future employers. Bringing IT companies' real-world challenges and successes into the SPTech classroom reinforced their commitment to hire some of the graduates they were helping prepare for the job market. It also ensured that SPTech's curriculum addressed the complex reality of professional qualification in Brazil.

The school's physical space was designed to support the objectives of the Symbiosis Project. Its modern building sits on Paulista Avenue, São Paulo's main economic hub. Three floors are dedicated to digital ecosystem companies (digital marketing, digital certification, identity recognition companies, vehicle-tracking companies, and gamification for training companies). There are also three labs (the Internet of Things, user experience, and design thinking) in partnership with some of the major companies in the digital market.

PARTNERS TO PROTAGONISTS

The Symbiosis Project launched with four partner companies and 60 students. Over the next six years, the number of partner companies expanded to 48, including IBM, HP, Google, Motorola, PwC, Deloitte, C6 Bank, Accenture, Tivit, Stefanini, inventCloud, and V8.Tech. The ecosystem now includes 150 technology professionals and an incubator. By 2023, the school had graduated its 1,000th student and had a 100% employment rate for graduates.

PROTAGONISTS TO INDIVIDUALS

The self-financing mechanisms built into the Symbiosis Project promote student autonomy. Many align their aspirations with SPTech's purpose. The resulting sense of belonging and responsibility motivates students to adopt and personalize the collective purpose in ways that drive their decisions and actions, not only before they graduate but after, as their careers progress. The collective purpose becomes a foundation on which individuals can begin building their own purpose.

IMPACT

The Symbiosis Project continues to create pathways to higher education, promote personal growth, and transform lives. Its ecosystem strengthens workforce qualifications to align with market needs, supports technological advancement, boosts the country's economic potential, and helps reduce poverty and inequality.

Thanks in part to the Symbiosis Project, the school's dropout rate decreased from 53% (2017) to 3% (2024). Enrollment increased at a rate of 159% between 2018 and 2024. After 2020, the cost of sponsoring a student was reduced by more than 90%, and after six years of implementation, the share of SPTech interns tripled in most of the leading Brazilian IT companies.

The project has significantly impacted several United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs), including SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), SDG 1 (No Poverty), and especially SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals).

GUIDELINES

What can the Symbiosis Project teach us about purpose-driven systems change? Purpose is not enough. Systems changers must begin with an in-depth examination of why the old system persists. This investigation is not trivial, as many problems interlock. Solutions can be found, but better ones emerge when multiple stakeholders come together to share the same purpose. Purpose is not enough to keep going, either. A complex array of stakeholders must co-create visions and change models, commit to changing the system, and carry purpose forward in their broader networks and throughout their careers.

The following four guidelines are designed to ensure that purpose drives system-level change:

1. **Critique the old.** An in-depth examination of the issue's root causes lays the groundwork for a collaborative approach. This inquiry exposes the systemic nature of the issue and emphasizes the need for a concerted effort to resolve it.

2. **Co-create the new.** Find stakeholders who are not just impacted by the problem's root causes but also have complementary abilities, resources, or viewpoints. All parties are called to co-design solutions. Empowering stakeholder co-creation guarantees that the solutions will be adaptive and flexible enough to adjust to changing conditions.

3. **Engage long term.** All parties must continue to relate to the shared vision while meeting their own objectives. Putting in place procedures that promote continuing commitment, communication, and teamwork guarantees that participants remain engaged.

4. **Track changes.** Provide mechanisms for continuous assessment and observation. By monitoring results, stakeholders can control their progress, evaluate the results of their interventions, and make needed corrections. Continuous observation

ensures that the relationship stays in balance and that the system adapts to new opportunities or obstacles.

CONCLUSION

The Symbiosis Project demonstrates how individual purpose can evolve into collective purpose, driving critical interventions for systems change. It also shows how collective purpose can resonate with individuals in the system, helping them develop and reinforce their own sense of purpose.

The Symbiosis Project followed guidelines for purpose-driven change, resulting in codevelopment of cutting-edge technical content, implementation of social-emotional skills-development programs, the fostering of practice-oriented transformative learning, and an ability to change students' futures by successfully preparing them for the job market.

REFERENCES

1 Waddock, Sandra, et al. "The Complexity of Wicked Problems in Large Scale Change." *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, Vol. 28, No. 6, October 2015.

2 Pongeluppe, Leandro S. "The Favela Effect: Spatial Inequalities and Firm Strategies in Disadvantaged Urban Communities." *Strategic Management Journal*, Vol. 43, No. 13, May 2022.

3 Lashitew, Addisu A., Oana Branzei, and Rob van Tulder. "Community Inclusion Under Systemic Inequality: How For-Profit Businesses Pursue Social Purpose." *Journal of Management Studies*, Vol. 61, No. 1, January 2023.

4 The term "symbiosis" comes from biology and defines close, long-term interaction between two or more organisms, which can take various forms. These interactions are crucial for ecological balance and species evolution.

5 Van Roy, Vincent, Daniel Vértesy, and Marco Vivarelli. "Technology and Employment: Mass Unemployment or Job Creation? Empirical Evidence from European Patenting Firms." *Research Policy*, Vol. 47, No. 9, November 2018.

About the authors

Lara Liboni is Associate Professor at Ivey Business School, Western University, Canada, with a fellowship research position at the Bertalanffy Center for the Study of Systems Science (BCSSS), Austria. Her expertise centers on strategy and sustainability, particularly on how collaborative systemic change can shape strategy toward innovation and sustainability. Dr. Liboni has published cutting-edge research in several highly cited journals and conferences. She has been working to integrate systems thinking and sustainability in management education to develop responsible leaders. Dr. Liboni is the author of *Systems Thinking and Systems Theory for Management*. She has supervised several PhD theses and has designed and coordinated numerous academic and executive programs. Previously, Dr. Liboni was a consultant to several firms and organizations, including PwC, UNICA (Brazilian Sugarcane Industry and Bioenergy Association), and United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). She has also worked with nonprofit organizations, such as Carolinian Canada, PICE Entrepreneurship, and Lar de Eurípedes Foundation. With a consolidated academic career and a consultancy background, Dr. Liboni has sat on different private board councils, developing important bonds between research and practice in strategic sectors, such as IT and agri-food. She has coordinated several cross-sector projects to promote systemic change and innovative strategies toward sustainability. Dr. Liboni earned a PhD in business administration and management from the University of São Paulo, Brazil. She can be reached at lliboni@ivey.ca.

Luciana O. Cezarino is Assistant Professor in the Department of Management at Ca' Foscari University of Venice, Italy. Her research interests span sustainable development, value chain management, and Industry 4.0, with a particular focus on applying systems approaches to organizational dynamics. Previously, Dr. Cezarino was a tenured Associate Professor at the Federal University of Uberlândia, Brazil, where she also served as MBA Coordinator at FAAP (Fundação Armando Alvares Penteado) and held various teaching positions. Her academic journey includes a postdoctoral fellowship at the Polytechnic University of Milan, Italy, and as a visiting scholar at Bocconi University, Italy. Dr. Cezarino is actively involved in several international research networks and serves as Chief Editor of *Latin American Journal of Management for Sustainable Development*. She has secured multiple research grants and awards, including recognition for her contributions to climate change strategies and management practices. Dr. Cezarino holds a PhD in business administration from the University of São Paulo, Brazil. She can be reached at luciana.cezarino@unive.it.

Alessandro Goulart is President and Controlling Partner of São Paulo Tech School (SPTech), Brazil. Previously, he served as CEO of Softway, which not only became the fifth-largest entity in its sector within the Brazilian market but also earned the distinction of being one of the best companies to work for in Brazil. In his second venture, Mr. Goulart was founding Partner and CEO of Todo Technologia, where his strategic direction led it to be among the top 10 IT companies in Brazil. Mr. Goulart earned undergraduate and postgraduate degrees from Fundação Getulio Vargas/Escola de Administração de Empresas de São Paulo (FGV EAESP), Brazil, and a master's degree from the University of São Paulo, Brazil. His master's thesis examined the shortcomings of higher education in technology. He can be reached at Alessandro.goulart@sptech.school.

Vera Goulart serves as Academic Director and Partner at São Paulo Tech School (SPTech), Brazil. Previously, she was HR Director at Todo Technologia and Grupo Contax. During her tenure at these companies, she spearheaded the M&A process of 11 technology firms. In a significant career shift, Ms. Goulart assumed leadership of the Academic Board at Bandeirantes Technology College (BANTEC), Colégio Bandeirantes, Brazil. Under her guidance and in collaboration with tech entrepreneurs and executives, BANTEC was rebranded and relaunched as SPTech. Ms. Goulart is also lead instructor for BANTEC's socio-emotional program. She earned a degree in business administration, a postgraduate diploma in positive psychology, and a master's degree from the Universidad de Ciencias Sociales, Argentina. Her master's research delved into addressing the educational gaps faced by technology professionals. She can be reached at Vera.goulart@sptech.school.

Rafael Petry is Director of Marketing and New Business Development at the São Paulo Tech School (SPTech), Brazil. He is also a member of the Global Organizational Learning and Development Network (GOLDEN) for the Sustainability Brazil research group at the Faculdade de Economia, Administração e Contabilidade de Ribeirão Preto (FEA-RP), researching motivation, team management, and corporate social responsibility. Mr. Petry earned a master's degree in business administration from the School of Economics, Administration, and Accounting at the University of São Paulo, Brazil; a bachelor's degree in business administration from the State University of Santa Catarina, Brazil, as well as a specialist degree from IBMEC, Brazil, underscoring his extensive executive experience. He can be reached at Rafael.petry@sptech.school.

1,000 DAYS OF EXISTENTIAL PURPOSE

Authors

Andriy Rozhdestvensky, Sofiya Opatska,
and Gerard Seijts

Studies and countless stories illustrate that internalized purpose helps humans flourish across disciplines and spheres. The Russia-Ukraine war is a dramatic example of how purpose can shape our ability to respond to the events in our lives.

After the start of the invasion on 24 February 2022, analysts estimated that the Russian Armed Forces would be capable of capturing Kyiv and removing the Ukrainian government within three days. As we write this, Ukrainians are approaching 1,000 days of bloodshed, tens of thousands killed, separated families, anger, and anxiety. They are living through unimaginable hardship with exceptional fortitude, with no end in sight.

More than 10 million people fled their homes during the war. Roads, power plants, schools, hospitals, museums, and universities have been damaged or destroyed, leaving millions with disrupted services. Morale among citizens and soldiers remains high, but everyone is battling physical and mental fatigue. How can soldiers be inspired to continue to fight and defend Ukraine? How can societal leaders come to terms with the damage inflicted on them and then make the substantive shift of returning to a peacetime leadership approach equipped to rebuild and regenerate the country?

Research shows that the impact of purpose on individuals and their communities can be profound.[1-3] On 20 May 2019, Volodymyr Zelenskyy was sworn in as Ukraine's head of state. Zelenskyy and his administration had formulated many objectives for his first term, including economic betterment of ordinary citizens and building a non-corrupt and responsive government. His focus, and indeed purpose, changed dramatically on 24 February 2022 when Russia launched the full-scale invasion.

In one of his early addresses to the nation and the world, Zelenskyy said, "We are fighting for our rights, for our freedoms, for our life."[4] Leadership is about clarity of purpose, which focuses people and energizes them to contribute. But how is purpose enacted during the most dramatic circumstance: an existential threat? Resilience is key to adapting to the most dire situations; it feeds purpose. Dunja Mijatović, former Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, noted that the resilience of the Ukrainian people stands as a testament to the indomitable spirit of freedom.

RESILIENCE IS KEY TO ADAPTING TO THE MOST DIRE SITUATIONS; IT FEEDS PURPOSE

To discover the origins of this remarkable resilience, we interviewed five Ukrainian leaders (from parliament, armed forces, church, business, the not-for-profit sector, and academia). We share their hard-won insights in this article, offering lessons to those who are ready to engage in purpose-driven leadership.

WHERE DOES UKRAINIAN RESILIENCE COME FROM?

Borys Gudziak, Metropolitan-Archbishop of the Ukrainian Catholic Archeparchy of Philadelphia and president of Ukrainian Catholic University, Lviv, said:

> Many Ukrainians recognize this constant fight: every day you wake up, and it's a fight for your right to live. Ukrainians are emerging from a totalitarian and genocidal legacy.

For decades, people in Ukraine lived under a totalitarian regime that repressed the language, literature, and church and eliminated large parts of the cultural intelligentsia (artists, poets, and writers). In the 20th century, more than 15 million Ukrainians were killed. Ukraine faced a genocide in the 1930s: the Holodomor was a man-made famine perpetrated by Joseph Stalin from 1932 to 1933 to annihilate the Ukrainian nation.

Gudziak further noted:

> We are seeing this attempt to annihilate the nation once again. Consider what happened in Irpin, Izium, Bucha, and other towns that were under occupation. Once these towns were liberated, people found mass graves. Citizens were raped, tortured, and disfigured before they were killed. This is what Russian occupation means. So it's really freedom or death. We have no other way out. If Putin succeeds, there will be no Ukraine.

Andy Hunder, president of the American Chamber of Commerce in Ukraine, located in Kyiv, says businesses and their people have shown great resilience during the war, in part thanks to historical events:

> Our Internet works better than in many cities across Europe. The banking sector works seamlessly. The infrastructure in Kyiv continues to work. Many organizations were proactive and preparing for a full-scale invasion. The decision was made to move many of the services into the cloud immediately. The safest place for infrastructure during World War II was in the tunnels. Today, in Ukraine, the safest place is in the cloud.

> People come to work every day. Organizations are successful, often without electricity from the grid. How do you run a McDonald's restaurant without electricity? You need to have generators in place. Employees need to understand what to do in the event of an air-raid alarm. Employees are trained to shut down restaurants immediately and help customers evacuate. Once the threat has passed and the "all clear" has been given, restaurants typically reopen within an hour.

A MINDSET CHANGE

Hunder spoke about a change in mindset among many CEOs:

> Some CEOs had a reputation of having big egos. This mindset has made way for a deep sense of humility. When you're attending a funeral, standing over the coffin of someone you knew, it gets quite personal. What

do you say to someone who has lost so much? You realize how fragile we are and how quickly we can lose what we have. We need to be grateful for the blessings we have.

The number one question for leaders and citizens is, "What is the right thing to do?" Then, we must understand how history will judge us. Many CEOs now see their purpose as boosting the economy, generating revenues, and paying taxes to keep the country from tipping over. If there's no economy, we won't be able to pay pensions. We won't be able to pay teachers. We won't be able to fund the military.

People understand that this is an existential war. Hence, purpose was suddenly and broadly shared. Putin and the Russian Armed Forces are trying to annihilate us. We are an independent nation, a sovereign state. It is therefore no surprise that many citizens volunteered from the first days of the war. People have a strong desire to defend the country, to fight to protect their families, and to take their children to safety. People are considering where they can contribute the most.

Roman Lozynskyi, a member of Ukraine's parliament, volunteered to join the ranks of the Armed Forces of Ukraine and served in the Special Operations Forces. He articulated that it is your responsibility as a citizen to determine in what country you want to live. Since Russia embarked on a full-scale invasion to destroy Ukraine, he saw only one option: fight to protect his family, his friends, and the country. Lozynskyi posted the following shortly after pushing the Russian Armed Forces back around the city of Mykolaiv in the fall of 2022:

> Our offensive is about superhuman effort and chivalry. It is about battlefield losses, and a lot of eyes full of fear, but there is a lot more faith, and love, in our hearts. It's about taking a step without knowing if there is a mine or tripwire ahead; but every step you take is confident and resolute because you are walking on your land, in your own home.

AUTHOR NOTE

Andriy Rozhdestvensky produced the documentary *Ukraine: A Leadership Exam*. The filming of the documentary took place during the summer of 2023 and highlights the stories of three leaders — representing different professions, with distinct backgrounds and outlooks on life. Their leadership led to results that practically no one expected. Resilience and purpose play a prominent role in their success.

Yaroslav Rushchyshyn, a member of Ukraine's parliament and businessman, put it this way:

> You have to leave the world around you in a better condition than before you came to it. This principle should drive our behavior during our lifetime. That's why our existence is paramount, as is the well-being and happiness of our children, our grandchildren, and those Ukrainians after them. This is why we are fighting now. We know that we set a high goal and that we could die during this war. But this is all part of the "wish for greatness" that patriarch Josyf Slipyj once coined — that we will be able to live peacefully and decide our own fate.

THE NUMBER ONE QUESTION FOR LEADERS & CITIZENS IS, "WHAT IS THE RIGHT THING TO DO?"

EXISTENTIAL PURPOSE'S ROLE IN DAILY ACTIVITIES

When asked how existential purpose plays a role in day-to-day activities, Gudziak responded:

> My personal purpose has been key and clear. As soon as I graduated from my doctoral studies at Harvard University, I was asked to work at Ukrainian Catholic University. Eventually, I became the rector of the refounded university in 2002. I considered working at Ukrainian Catholic University a once-in-a-millennium kind of opportunity. A totalitarian system had collapsed without great bloodshed. There was great hunger for openness to learning and connection. In that context, it was possible to develop a university from scratch.
>
> We were trying to reinvent the university. We sought to offer an education and a formation that is holistic, that sees the human being not only as a brain to be programmed, but as an integrated being with mind, soul, body, and spirit. I believe that, today, the community atmosphere of Ukrainian Catholic University and its programs are a model not only for higher education, but for many public, private, and not-for-profit sector institutions across Ukraine.

I tell students that I hope the university prepares them for good family life because family life is a challenge, and many children today are scarred by the wounds occurring in their families. We hope individuals are open to something that will give them a more holistic vision, an understanding, and, hopefully, a competence that benefits families, communities, and Ukraine.

Others had to find that purpose amid the full-scale invasion. Kateryna Glazkova, CEO of Union of Ukrainian Entrepreneurs, explained that, initially, she was frustrated and even felt guilty:

I thought I was not doing enough for my country to win the war. I am not in the army, and I was not involved in big, tactical projects. I felt compelled to do more because Ukraine is my country, my life, my future, and the future of my kids. Then I began to realize that I must focus on the things I know I can do best: connecting people and representing Ukrainian business abroad. I am not on the front line with soldiers. However, through my ongoing activities at the Union of Ukrainian Entrepreneurs, I can inspire and support the leaders working to defeat Russia's invasion.

Lozynskyi voiced a similar sentiment:

I changed roles; I moved from parliament to the armed forces and back to parliament. I had to reflect where I could be most effective, to get the best results for the people I care about. The behaviors I display as a soldier and parliamentarian are different, but the underlying purpose is the same.

Rushchyshyn reflected on how his personal purpose changed when he made the transition from business leader to parliament member. He became deeply motivated to create supportive business environments for entrepreneurs, including complete legal frameworks, quality infrastructure, prudent taxation, and stable institutions:

We must create markets because if everyone wants to leave this country, there won't be much of a future. That's why I became involved in politics: to create additional value. This was really important to me because someone once told me that it is virtually impossible to be happy in an unhappy country.

Then I started to think bigger! I wanted to build trust up. There are small islands of trust in our communities. I wanted to connect those islands and create even more trust. We have institutions in Ukraine that have this trust, including academic institutions, NGOs, and anticorruption institutions. This became a focus of mine: helping create enough high-quality institutions to facilitate a well-functioning economy and generate wealth for people. This ecosystem will increase trust in our society and, importantly, get me closer to my personal purpose: shaping a happy country with happy people.

PURPOSE & LEADERSHIP

There is a clear connection between purpose and leadership. Leadership not only defines purpose, it reinforces and inspires it. Zelenskyy is a compelling example of a leader working through a profoundly challenging circumstance: an unprovoked war and the concomitant loss of human lives.

Throughout the war, Zelenskyy has inspired and mobilized collective action against Russia at an unprecedented breadth, depth, and pace by rallying Ukraine's citizens and its military, as well as galvanizing most of the international community. Zelenskyy's famous response of "I need ammunition, not a ride" when offered the chance by US officials to flee advancing Russian troops, is one of his defining moments.

Noted Hunder:

The leadership was here, and they projected calm. The expression "cometh the hour, cometh the man" is appropriate for this situation.

The positive relational energy Zelenskyy generated led people to believe they mattered and that they were needed to achieve a purpose. Many stories of inspiration followed, including one about the soldiers on Snake Island, a Ukrainian outpost in the Black Sea. One of the soldiers, Roman Hrybov, didn't hold back when threatened by a Russian warship. A Russian officer said, "This is a Russian military warship. I suggest you lay down your weapons and surrender to avoid bloodshed and needless casualties. Otherwise, you will be bombed." Hrybov responded: "Russian warship, go f*** yourself." Such defiance served as a boost for morale among Ukrainians.

Glazkova notes the importance of entrepreneurs as role models for people, not only for employees or business partners, but for people within their communities. She and her colleagues conducted a survey shortly before the invasion. Entrepreneurs of medium-sized businesses received the highest trust scores, second only to the Ukrainian Armed Forces. Entrepreneurs tend to be reliable partners for government and citizens: they are known to prepare food for people and buy medicines for hospitals. When Glazkova asked Promodo CEO Alexandr Kolb why he was staying in Kharkiv amid constant Russian bombardments, he said that he believes his role is to be an optimist and to radiate this to the people around him.

Rushchyshyn said he firmly believes that sacrifice or selflessness (as demonstrated by entrepreneurs) helps build trust. He is not talking only about putting one's life on the line; small acts can foster trust as well. Individuals are more likely to embrace purpose if they believe their leaders, colleagues, neighbors, and friends have their best interests in mind (such as leading by example or providing ongoing support to people in need). Rushchyshyn unequivocally stated that without deeply rooted trust in society and its myriad institutions in the public, private, and not-for-profit sectors, it is hard to excel at anything as a country, let alone survive an existential war.

EXISTENTIAL PURPOSE BRINGS PEOPLE TOGETHER

In Ukraine, people from a variety of backgrounds have come together through an overarching, existential purpose. They are playing different roles — with a set of day-to-day activities — to create a better, stronger country for future generations. Lozynskyi talked about the role that people play in this:

> We are fighting the Russian Armed Forces in constant deficit, notably lacking weapons systems: tanks, drones, artillery, and so on. But what inspires me to continue to fight and defend Ukraine is our people. We are fighting for the same goal, and we are working through a common experience that builds strong bonds. The will of the people is on full display.

Gudziak talked about four key concepts: solidarity, subsidiarity, common good, and human dignity. For example, almost 1,000 days into the full-scale invasion, observers are seeing extraordinary solidarity. On 8 July 2024 in Kyiv, Okhmatdyt, Ukraine's largest pediatric clinic, renowned for its cancer treatment, was targeted by a Russian missile attack that killed at least four people and left many injured. Ukrainian organizations collected more than US $6 million within two days to support the hospital and children.

Throughout the war, observers also see the principle of subsidiarity at work:

> Subsidiarity means bringing decisions and responsibility down to a more popular level, not waiting for instructions from our president or someone else at the top of a pyramid to solve the problems we encounter. Ukrainians across the country, at all levels, took initiative inspired by purpose and success stories. Subsidiarity (the assignment of tasks and responsibilities) is most visible and effective when there is trust among individuals and institutions.

> Solidarity and subsidiarity help us defend human dignity and work toward a common good. Ukrainians who took to the squares for peaceful protests throughout the history of independence (the Orange Revolution of 2004 and the Revolution of Dignity in 2014) were consciously or unconsciously formed by these values, and this has influenced the entire country. I believe these principles are not purely religious; they are deeply human and foundational to the development of a civil society.

Hunder came to Ukraine in 1996 and noted that he has never seen Ukrainians as united as they are now. He also realizes that people are wondering what will happen after the war. Rebuilding the country will require a clear and united vision:

> There are all kinds of temptations to go back to some of the old ways, including corruption. We need to ask ourselves what the right thing is. I think there will be those that say, "Well, here's a shortcut. Let's do this and generate some short-term gains."
>
> There will be a lot of difficult, unpopular moves ahead, especially as we prepare for the biggest recovery of a nation in Europe since World War II. We need to get ready for that. The people who will be in government after the war, who are responsible for the infrastructure and many other portfolios, are going to face challenging situations. We need to find champions, people who are inspired by the idea of recovery and the opportunities ahead to create a better, stronger country for future generations.

CONCLUSION

The Russia-Ukraine war is a compelling illustration of how purpose has a profound effect on individuals and their communities. The observations we gathered from conversations with five leaders speak to 1,000 days in the life of an ecosystem of purpose.

We urge readers to identify their own takeaways, but one key insight is that, fundamentally, a triad of sacrifice, solidarity, and subsidiarity can safeguard a common future — not merely of individuals, but of society — that would be otherwise in peril. The role of deep, personal leadership in facilitating this triad through inspiration, building resilience, and fostering trust can never be underestimated.

Scientist and humanist Carl Sagan wrote, "The significance of our lives and our fragile realm derives from our own wisdom and courage. We are the custodians of life's meaning." Especially in times of adversity, purpose is a crucial element in forging a meaningful path forward. "There is no compelling evidence for a cosmic Parent who will care for us and save us from ourselves," Sagan concluded. "It is up to us."[5]

REFERENCES

[1] Strecher, Victor J. *Life on Purpose: How Living for What Matters Most Changes Everything*. HarperOne, 2016.

[2] Quinn, Robert E., and Anjan Thakor. *The Economics of Higher Purpose: Eight Counterintuitive Steps for Creating a Purpose-Driven Organization*. Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2019.

[3] Malnight, Thomas W., Ivy Buche, and Charles Dhanaraj. "Put Purpose at the Core of Your Strategy." *Harvard Business Review*, September–October 2019.

[4] Fieldstadt, Elisha. "Zelenskyy Gets Standing Ovation After Speech to European Parliament: 'Nobody Is Going to Break Us.'" NBC News, 1 March 2022.

[5] Friend, David, and *LIFE*. *The Meaning of Life: Reflections in Words and Pictures on Why We Are Here*. Little Brown & Co., 1991.

About the authors

Andriy Rozhdestvensky is Professor of Leadership and Executive Director of the Center for Leadership for Ukrainian Catholic University (UCU). He is a member of the Supervisory Board of Transparency International in Ukraine and a business consultant. Previously, Dr. Rozhdestvensky served as profiler-analyst for the Israeli security service, engaging in counterterrorism activities, including the establishment of special communications and negotiations. He later became an HR partner for JSC Oschadbank, adapting western HR tools to the realities of a state-owned enterprise and participating in other HR-related activities. Dr. Rozhdestvensky is coauthor of two documentary films dedicated to leadership as well as several business cases. He earned a master's degree in psychology from the National Pedagogical Dragomanov University, Ukraine, and a PhD from GS Kostiuk Institute of Psychology of the National Academy of Educational Sciences of Ukraine. He can be reached at arozhdestvensky@lvbs.com.ua.

Sofiya Opatska is Vice Rector for Strategic Development at Ukrainian Catholic University (UCU). She is Founding Dean and Head of the Board of UCU Business School. Ms. Opatska is also VP of the board of directors of the European Federation of Catholic Universities (FUCE) and a board member for the first Impact Investment project in Ukraine Promprylad. She has more than 25 years' experience in business education, educational institution management, and the corporate sector. Ms. Opatska continues to be a change agent in the Ukrainian education system as well as in Ukraine's development of business education, where she brings a deep understanding of the challenges of fast-growing organizations. Ms. Opatska's research and teaching focus on resilience, crisis management, and leadership in Ukrainian companies during the ongoing war. She can be reached at sopatska@ucu.edu.ua.

Gerard Seijts is Professor of Organizational Behavior at the Ivey Business School, Western University, Canada. He was the inaugural Executive Director of the Ian O. Ihnatowycz Institute for Leadership. Dr. Seijts is coauthor of several books, including *Leadership on Trial: A Manifesto for Leadership Development*; *Good Leaders Learn: Lessons from Lifetimes of Leadership*; *Developing Leadership Character*; *The Character Compass: Transforming Leadership for the 21st Century*; and *Character: What Contemporary Leaders Can Teach Us About Building a More Just, Prosperous, and Sustainable Future*. His award-winning research on leadership and leader character is published in top management journals, and he has authored numerous articles in practitioner journals. Dr. Seijts has designed and led executive education programs for public, private, and not-for-profit sector organizations around the world. He received a PhD in organizational behavior and human resource management from the Rotman School of Management, University of Toronto, Canada. He can be reached at GSeijts@ivey.ca.

AMPLIFY

Anticipate, Innovate, Transform

Cutter is Arthur D. Little's Open Consulting community, bringing expert academics and business leaders together to advance thinking in key areas of business and technology.

These insights are delivered though our Amplify family of publications, providing a platform where academic frameworks and practical experience can combine to generate new ideas and innovative solutions.

Arthur D. Little has been pushing the boundaries of innovation since 1886, linking people, technology and strategy to help our clients overcome today's most pressing challenges, while seizing tomorrow's most promising opportunities.

Our people are present in the most important business centers around the world, combining strong practical industry experience with excellent knowledge of key trends, technologies and market dynamics. We are proud to work alongside most of the Fortune 1000 companies and other leading firms and public sector organizations, supporting them to accelerate performance, innovate through convergence and digital and make a positive impact on the world.

It's what we believe makes *The Difference*.

CUTTER

AN ARTHUR D. LITTLE COMMUNITY

For more content,
visit www.cutter.com