

PURPOSE IN PRACTICE

CLARITY, AUTHENTICITY
AND THE SPECTRE OF
PURPOSE WASH



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FOREWORD

It seems everybody's talking about purpose-driven business, and increasing numbers of CEOs around the world are committing themselves to delivering positive social and environmental impact. But what does this mean for you and your business in practice?

You've no doubt seen reports and articles saying companies that commit to making the world a better place for everyone – not just themselves – outperform those that don't ¹. There seems to be no end of research highlighting how purpose drives customer acquisition, brand loyalty and market share. We're told that purpose-driven organisations have more innovative, productive and happy workforces ² because they can recruit and retain the best talent ³. And purpose-driven businesses are more sustainable because their positive social and environmental impact strengthens the ecosystems on which they depend.

But all this can feel intangible – if not overwhelming – when set against the day-to-day realities of running an effective organisation or profitable business.

While many CSR programmes did – and do – deliver substantial benefit, at its worst CSR and sustainability initiatives were used as an instrument of reputation management, giving rise to *greenwash* as detractors seized on the contradiction between marketing and reality on the ground.

Are we doomed to an era of purpose wash, which would undermine trust in – and the impact of – companies that are authentically purpose-driven?

We asked senior decision makers and thinkers across multiple sectors for their views on the role of purpose in business. In the course of 25 in-depth interviews this is what we learned.

Henry Playfoot

Strategy Director, Claremont Communications

1. A 2012 Deutsche Bank review of 56 academic research papers revealed that 89% of the studies showed companies with strong 'Environmental, Social and Governance' (ESG) factors outperformed competitors on a market basis, while 85% showed these types of companies exhibited accounting-based outperformance. Mark Fulton et al, *Sustainable Investing: Establishing Long-Term Value and Performance*, DB Climate Change Advisors, Deutsche Bank Group, 2012, dbadvisors.com, p. 5.

2. *The Business Case for Purpose*, Harvard Business Review Analytics Services, Harvard Business Review, 2015, hbr.org/resources/pdfs/comm/ey/19392HBRReportEY.pdf pp. 8-10.

3. According to a 2013 report by Deloitte, executives are more than 50% likely to be attracted to and retained by a company if they feel there is a strong sense of purpose. *Culture of Purpose: A Business Imperative, 2013 Core Beliefs and Culture Survey*, Deloitte LLP, 2013, deloitte.com/us/en/pages/about-deloitte/articles/culture-of-purpose.html pp. 6-8.

WHAT IS PURPOSE?

In a landmark report published in the Harvard Business Review in 2011, Michael Porter and Mark Kramer argued that capitalism was in crisis due to a narrow approach to “value creation” and a short-term focus on financial performance. Their remedy was *purpose*, which demands a fundamentally different approach:

“Companies could bring business and society back together if they redefined their purpose as creating ‘shared value’ - generating economic value in a way that also produces value for society by addressing its challenges.”⁴

Our interviewees do not share a single definition of purpose, but agree that it is about looking beyond the need to generate profit to positively impact individuals, society and the environment.

Purpose-driven organisations, including businesses, Government, social enterprises, not-for-profits and charities, seem to be characterised by long-termism, commitment to craft – doing something really well – and recognition of the connection between the wellbeing of the company and the wellbeing of its staff, partners, suppliers and the wider world.

Although definitions may vary, our participants were unanimous on one thing: purpose must be authentic and *lived*, and when it is, it is experienced and felt by everyone.

4. Michael E. Porter & Mark Kramer, *Creating Shared Value: Redefining Capitalism and the Role of the Corporation in Society*, Harvard Business Review, 2011.



FROM CSR TO PURPOSE

The belief that business should do less harm initiated the emergence of Corporate Social Responsibility and its growth over the past 60 years.

“The phrase Corporate Social Responsibility was coined in 1953 with the publication of Bowen’s Social Responsibility of Businessmen, which posed the question: ‘Which responsibilities to society can businesspeople be reasonably expected to assume?’ In 1984, the celebrated management consultant Peter Drucker wrote about the imperative to turn social problems into economic opportunities.”⁵

“WHILE BUSINESS HAS MADE A COMMITMENT TO BECOMING MORE SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE, MOST ORGANISATIONS VIEW THIS ROLE IN HYGIENE TERMS. IT IS ABOUT MAKING SURE THEY DON’T DO BAD STUFF – OR DON’T GET CAUGHT DOING BAD STUFF. BUT THE SMART COMPANIES ARE WAKING UP TO THE FACT THAT THE FUTURE OF BUSINESS IS NOT ABOUT MINIMISING THE BAD THINGS IT DOES (CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY) BUT MAXIMIZING THE GOOD IT DOES (CORPORATE SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT).”

DAVID GERSHON
EMPOWERMENT INSTITUTE

But CSR has largely failed to live up to its promise. Certainly, a thoughtful, structured and properly resourced CSR programme can generate substantial social and environmental impact. But in practice – in most cases – CSR’s impact is limited by its role as an add-on. In the worst case scenario, claims of CSR are used to create a false or misleading impression of the company they are serving ⁶.

Where CSR is usually treated as an organisational *function*, social purpose is the business’s *raison d’être* ⁷. If CSR is the department used to offset the sometimes brutal business of maximising profits, purpose is fundamental to how the business *thinks* and is at the heart of everything it *does*.

CSR does not create or necessarily reflect a purpose-driven business (although it may be part of how that business operates).

Authentic purpose-driven business requires a worldview that goes above and beyond CSR; rather than being a business unit, purpose is best understood as both a mindset and a process.

5. *What’s Wrong With Corporate Social Responsibility?* Corporate Watch.

6. For examples and case studies in the oil and gas industry, see Jędrzej George Frynas, ‘The False Developmental Promise of Corporate Social Responsibility: Evidence From Multinational Oil Companies’, *International Affairs*, 81: 581-598, 2005.

7. Paul Polman, *Business, Society, and the Future of Capitalism*, McKinsey Quarterly, May 2014, [mckinsey.com/business-functions/sustainability-and-resource-productivity/our-insights/business-society-and-the-future-of-capitalism](https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/sustainability-and-resource-productivity/our-insights/business-society-and-the-future-of-capitalism).

**“THERE’S A BIG DIFFERENCE
BETWEEN PURPOSE AND CSR.
WITH CSR, ‘DOING GOOD’ IS SILOED
IN A SEPARATE FUNCTION AND
CAN BE DROPPED WHEN TIMES
GET TOUGH; WITH PURPOSE,
DOING GOOD SHOULD BE BAKED
INTO EVERYTHING YOU DO.”**

RAJEEB DEY
CEO, ENTERNSHIPS

PURPOSE IS A MINDSET

“IT’S ABOUT PEOPLE WHO KEEP THEIR EYE ON THE LONG TERM, PEOPLE WHO UNDERSTAND VALUE, WHO UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU INVEST IN; YOU INVEST IN THE CULTURE OF YOUR BUSINESS, AND YOU’RE NOT JUST INVESTING FOR THIS YEAR’S PROFIT, YOU’RE INVESTING RIGHT THE WAY DOWN THE LINE.”

ANDREW HARDING
CHARTERED INSTITUTE OF MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTANTS

Participants were clear that a business can only be said to be purpose-driven insofar as people throughout the business are meaningfully engaged in the company's purpose.

Those interviewed explained that a CEO and leadership team with a purposeful mindset is necessary – but insufficient – for a company to become authentically purpose-driven. And while mission statements are helpful, words alone are never enough.

“Purpose really comes down to mindset. It means building a culture that taps into your people's sense of aspiration. It means empowering everyone you work with - from your clients or customers to your employees to your communities - not just to do better, but to be better. After all, purpose is truly about doing well by doing good.”⁸

Participants also stated that having a purpose means thinking differently about value. It involves thinking about the short term and the long term – about economic and societal wellbeing – about how business relates to society and the world at large.

8. Mark Weinberger (Global Chairman and CEO, EY), *The Power of Purpose*, betterworkingworld.ey.com/purpose/power-purpose.

“IT'S IMPORTANT FOR THOSE OF US IN BUSINESS TO SAY 'WE'RE IN THE BUSINESS OF MAKING MONEY.' AND THAT'S A GOOD THING, BUT THAT'S ALMOST THE LAST PURPOSE THAT ANYONE TALKS ABOUT BECAUSE SOMEHOW IT SEEMS GRUBBY.”

DAVID BAKER
THE SCHOOL OF LIFE

“I CAME TO A CROSSROADS WHERE I HAD TO DECIDE – 'DO I GO AND DO GOOD IN THE WORLD, OR DO I GO AND DO BUSINESS?' SO WHEN I FOUND OUT ABOUT ETSY IT FELT LIKE THIS SUDDEN REVELATION, LIKE THERE WAS A WAY TO BRING THESE TWO THINGS TOGETHER.”

NICOLE VANDERBILT
ETSY

“ONLY ONE FIFTH OF OUR CEO'S KPIS IS RELATED TO TURNOVER... OBVIOUSLY WE NEED TO SELL, WE NEED TO BE PROFITABLE – BECAUSE THAT'S LIKE OUR OXYGEN – BUT THAT'S NOT OUR PURPOSE AND IT CAN NEVER BE OUR PURPOSE.”

LENE FRIIS
LEGO

PURPOSE IS A PROCESS

Purpose is *felt* and *revealed*, day-to-day, in everything a business does.

This means that every employee must *experience* a sense of purpose and *express* purpose through their actions: the way they create and deliver products and services; the way they treat suppliers; and the way they communicate – with each other and the rest of the world⁹.

For this reason, interviewees tended to see an organisation's purpose as something that endures and is perhaps best understood as a process.



“ORGANISATIONS TYPICALLY CONSTRUCT PURPOSE THROUGH IDEAS AND WORDS, DILUTING VISCERAL CONVICTIONS ABOUT PURPOSE IN THE PROCESS AND WHEN IT COMES TO DECIDING ON PURPOSE, WHOLE ORGANISATIONS OFTEN END UP WORKING FROM THE ‘STOMACH’ – THE FELT SENSE OF PURPOSE – OF ONE OR TWO LEADERS, FEELINGS THAT ULTIMATELY MAY NOT CARRY THROUGH THE ORGANISATION, UNLESS THEY ARE COMMUNICATED IN WAYS THAT HELP GIVE RISE TO SHARED EXPERIENCE OF THAT SENSE – NOT IDEA – OF PURPOSE.”

MATTHEW TAYLOR

SOCIETY FOR THE ENCOURAGEMENT OF ARTS,
MANUFACTURES AND COMMERCE (RSA)

PURPOSE IS A PROCESS

Whilst purpose can galvanise collective efforts, it must not be used to justify action that is detrimental to a business's interests or as a get-out-of-jail free card to duck difficult questions or decisions.

“I’VE WORKED A LOT WITH BIG CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS THAT HAVE BEEN FOUNDED OFTEN ON A PURPOSE BUT HAVE BECOME ABOUT CHANNELS - THEY’VE BECOME ABOUT DISTRIBUTION AND PRODUCTION AND BECOME MACHINES TO MAKE STUFF AND DISTRIBUTE STUFF AND BECAUSE THEY’VE BECOME SUCCESSFUL AT THAT, THEY HAVE FORGOTTEN THEIR PURPOSE.”

ANTHONY LILLEY OBE

“SCOUTING EXISTS TO ACTIVELY SUPPORT AND ENGAGE YOUNG PEOPLE IN THEIR PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT, EMPOWERING THEM TO MAKE A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION TO SOCIETY. AND ACTUALLY THAT IS JUST AS RELEVANT TODAY AS IT WAS IN 1907 WHEN WE WERE FOUNDED. OUR PURPOSE RUNS THROUGH OUR DNA AND HAS CHANGED VERY LITTLE SINCE THEN, DESPITE CHANGES IN THE MECHANICS OF HOW WE DO THINGS.”

DAVID HAMILTON
THE SCOUT ASSOCIATION



9. In a 2016 survey of 7,700 Millennials, Deloitte ascertained that 80% of the Millennials who envisioned a commitment of 5 years or more to their employers believed that they shared values with the company. Winning Over the Next Generation of Leaders: The Deloitte 2016 Millennial Survey 2016, Deloitte LLP, 2016, deloitte.com/global/en/pages/about-deloitte/articles/millennialsurvey.html pp. 10-13.

“YOU CAN HAVE A SITUATION WHERE THE SENSE OF PURPOSE OVERWHELMS THE ORGANISATION. IT CAN, ON OCCASION, DIVERT PEOPLE FROM BEHAVING STRATEGICALLY AND, IF YOU’RE NOT CAREFUL, IT CAN CREATE ANARCHY.”

HARRY RICH

WHY DO PURPOSE?

**BECOMING – AND REMAINING
– A PURPOSE-DRIVEN
ORGANISATION IS CLEARLY
A SIGNIFICANT UNDERTAKING,
REQUIRING EFFORT AND
INVESTMENT. SO WHY IS PURPOSE
SO HIGH ON THE AGENDA? WHY
ARE SO MANY BUSINESSES TAKING
IT SERIOUSLY? IN ANSWERING
THIS, THERE ARE VARIOUS LENSES
THROUGH WHICH WE CAN LOOK.**



DRIVE PROFIT

**“I DO THINK THAT CRAFTSMANSHIP,
AT ITS HEART, IS ABOUT PURPOSE.
BUILDING FOR THE LONG TERM IS
SOMETHING THAT WE TRY AND
HOLD ON TO TIGHTLY.”**

NICOLE VANDERBILT
ETSY

Our research suggests that having an authentic purpose can also result in gaining market share and cementing loyalty – what Ben & Jerry’s refers to as *fans* (as opposed to customers).

“I think in the end this is all inevitable - all business will have to become positive impact business, because people will demand it and customers will buy from companies that include a corporate sense of empathy and focus on how they grow their impact on their global community.”

Jostein Solheim, CEO, Ben & Jerry’s

Consumers will often choose where to spend their money based on their feelings about a brand’s values¹⁰, and companies that connect with – and have empathy with – consumers’ deeper needs and own sense of purpose will therefore be at a competitive advantage.

“A sense of purpose has come to be seen, rightly, as a value that not only has a place in business but is essential to long-term success.”

Arianna Huffington

“There’s so much yet to be invented. Think about an average day and consider everything that makes you unhappy... Businesses are still aimed at the bottom of Maslow’s pyramid, not the top.”

Alain de Botton

“Consumers want some help in answering the question of what, in a profound sense, their spending is for. When you have enough, what need is being served by having more?”

Will Hutton

Interviewees recognised that employees who feel a strong sense of purpose are more likely to produce higher quality work, as working with purpose will correlate with a commitment to excellence and a sense of *craft*. A person who believes there is purpose in what they are doing typically feels more connected and committed to their work, which often translates easily into gains in customer satisfaction and loyalty.

And there is a growing body of work arguing that purpose can also drive the distribution of *leadership, creativity* and *innovation* across organisations.

“Purpose and principles, clearly understood, articulated and commonly shared, are the genetic code of any healthy organization. To the degree that you hold purpose and principles in common among you, you can dispense with command and control. People will know how to behave in accordance with them, and they’ll do it in thousands of unimaginable, creative ways. The organization will become a vital, living set of beliefs.”¹¹

10. In a study conducted by *Elite Daily*, 75% of Millennials said that it was either “fairly important” or “very important” that the company from which they purchased contributed to society. *Millennial Consumer Trends 2015*, *Elite Daily*, 2015, elitedaily.com/millennial-consumer-trends-2015.

11. Dee Hock, founder of VISA, quoted by Adrian Bridgwater in his article *Why Workplace Automation Intelligence Can’t Replace Us Humans*, 2015.

MANAGE RISK AND BUILD TRUST

At its most basic, participants remarked that thinking about and expressing purpose is about meeting the expectations of – and building trust with – the markets that business serves.

In the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis, many commentators including Which? and the CBI noted the influence of a culture that prioritised short-term personal gain above all else:

“Too many bankers, especially at the most senior levels, have operated in an environment with insufficient personal responsibility... Remuneration has incentivised misconduct and excessive risk-taking, reinforcing a culture where poor standards were often considered normal.”¹²

It is easy to see how a business whose sole purpose is ‘profit at any cost’ can lead to behaviours at an individual, institutional and even regulatory level that disconnect an entire sector from its lifeblood: customers and society.

Purpose is of particular concern to Millennials (although not exclusively so), and many companies recognise the imperative of articulating and demonstrating a purpose in order to manage reputational risk and build positive relationships with the people they rely on, are influenced by and influence.

This point is echoed by the following sources:

“Eight in ten respondents... say it’s the responsibility of business to lead to solve societal problems - that’s a six percent increase from just a year ago. Business and its leaders should be authentic and visible not only in talking about its actions on societal challenges, but the values that underpin those actions and its operational performance.”¹³

“According to our 2015 survey, which polled more than 7,700 Millennials in 29 countries, the majority believe that business needs to reset its purpose... While they believe the pursuit of profit is important to sustaining a business, Millennials also say that pursuit must be accompanied by a sense of purpose.”¹⁴

12. Parliamentary Commission on Banking Standards 2013b, pp. 8-9.

13. Edelman Trust Barometer, *A New Business as Usual*, 2016.

14. Punit Renjen, CEO, Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu (Deloitte Global), *Millennials and Purpose: The Message is Clear for Business Leaders*.

**“FOR MILLENNIALS BUYING GOODS
AND SERVICES OF EVERY KIND...
A DOMINANT DRIVER BEYOND
PRICE POINT IS AUTHENTIC
SOCIAL IMPACT OF THE COMPANY
THAT THEY’RE BUYING FROM.”**

ADRIAN WALKER
HOGAN LOVELLS

RECRUIT AND RETAIN TALENT

“WE HAVE REACHED A TIPPING POINT: THE BRIGHTEST AND MOST AMBITIOUS STUDENTS NOW INCREASINGLY WANT TO WORK FOR A SOCIAL BUSINESS OR CHARITY, AND THE MOST SAVVY GRADUATE EMPLOYERS ARE NOW RECRUITING FOR SOCIAL LEADERSHIP.”

DAVID REED
GENERATION CHANGE

In the competition to recruit and retain talent, participants attached value to paying increasing attention to (current and potential) employees' demand for purpose. The talent pool (at least in those markets where talent is scarce) is a substantial force in encouraging companies to take action on purpose.

“NOW CONVERSATIONS WITH UNDERGRADUATES ARE ‘I WANT TO WORK IN A REAL BUSINESS, I WANT TO SEE THE VALUE OF THAT BUSINESS AND I WANT TO BE ABLE TO FEEL I AM PART OF DELIVERING THAT VALUE.’ THIS IS A VERY, VERY FUNDAMENTAL MINDSET SHIFT THAT PLAYS RIGHT ALONGSIDE YOUR ORGANISATIONAL PURPOSE AND AGENDA.”

ANDREW HARDING
 CHARTERED INSTITUTE OF MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTANTS

Again, this was reflected in our wider research:

“60% of the Millennials we surveyed say a ‘sense of purpose’ is part of the reason they chose to work for their current employer. And, in businesses where Millennials say there is a strong sense of purpose, there is significantly greater financial and recruitment success and higher employee satisfaction.”¹⁵

“The future of work, and indeed the future of the planet, is dependent on tomorrow’s top talent. And that’s a good thing. The next generation of industry leaders has its heart and mind set on making the world a better place and improving bottom lines for stakeholders, not just shareholders.”¹⁶

As a lever for talent retention, participants identified purpose as playing a central role in *engaging* staff in their work and acting as a focal point for rewarding effort that has an impact beyond numbers or productivity:

“WE HAVE AWARDS FOR PEOPLE WHO WE THINK HAVE MADE A BIG DIFFERENCE, SOMEONE WHO WENT ABOVE AND BEYOND THE SCOPE OF THEIR REMIT AND SAID ‘I’M GOING TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE SOMEHOW,’ TO COLGATE... OR TO THE EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT.”

ANA SANCHEZ
 COLGATE

15. Ibid.

16. John Converse Townsend and Kennerley Roper, *The New Age Of Purpose-Driven Talent*, Forbes online, 2015.

IMPROVE WELLBEING

To attract and retain talent, to increase productivity and sometimes to uphold ethical standards, interviewees said companies should recognise the need to ensure the wellbeing of their staff.

“According to reports that Gallup has been generating since 2000, two thirds of employees today feel disengaged and experience a lack of meaning at work, costing the American economy an estimated \$450-\$550 billion annually ... Globally, the percentage of disengagement in the workplace is 87 percent across 142 countries.”¹⁷

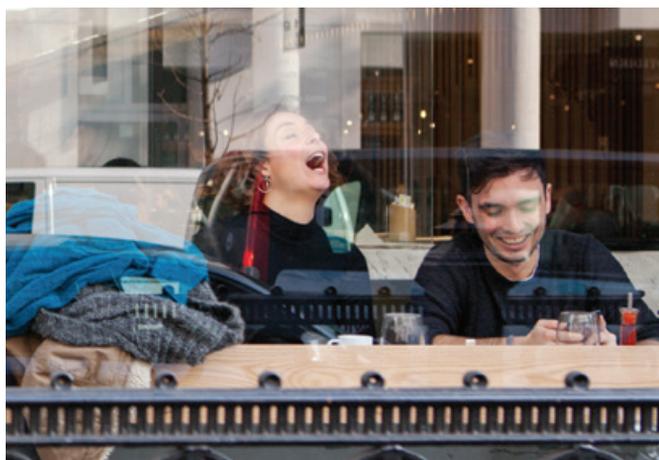
The ability to understand, articulate and pursue our own purpose is widely regarded as a fundamental determinant of our wellbeing, and relates closely to other basic needs such as our need for autonomy, integrity, belonging, growth and self-actualisation, to name but a few. This point is powerfully argued by pioneering academic William Damon:

“Study after study has found a person’s sense of life purpose to be closely connected to virtually all dimensions of wellbeing... The implication of these studies is that a disposition toward purposeful activity has been bred into us and plays a central role in energising and guiding many of us through the most important choices that we make in life.”¹⁸

Our interviewees pointed out that individuals’ alignment with organisational purpose leads to pride and job satisfaction, translating into a more stable and productive workforce:

“I WORK FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES, AN ORGANISATION WHERE THE CORE OF OUR MISSION STATEMENT IS ‘ENHANCING SOCIETY’. ACROSS THE BOARD, WHETHER IN EDITORIAL OR COMMERCIAL OR EVEN EXTERNAL PARTNERS, PEOPLE ARE INCREDIBLY PROUD TO BE ASSOCIATED WITH THIS MISSION. IT’S A BRAND THAT IS VERY STRONG IN WHAT IT REPRESENTS FOR PEOPLE – BOTH BECAUSE OF JOURNALISM BUT ALSO OUR UNRELENTING DIGITAL INNOVATION. ALL THAT TIES INTO A VERY DISTINCT ORGANISATIONAL SENSE OF PURPOSE.”

HELEN KONSTANTOPOULOS
NEW YORK TIMES



Our research suggests that employees' overall wellbeing is improved if they understand and identify with the organisation's purpose. But it is also important for an individual's wellbeing (and therefore the wellbeing of the business) that they have the opportunity to express and pursue their *own* sense of purpose through their work.

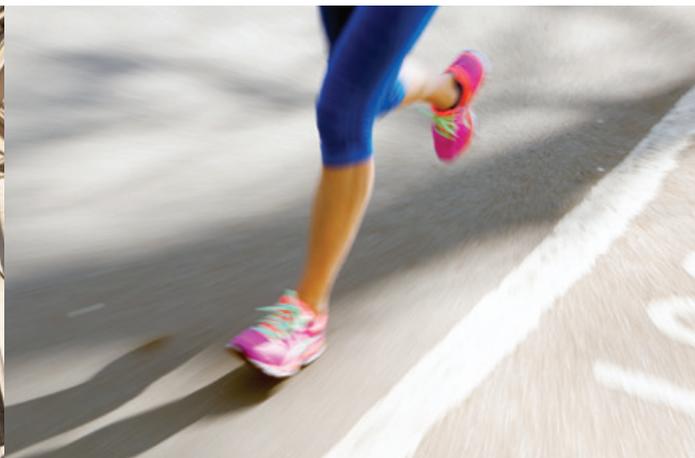
Some interviewees point out that there is a risk of organisations using their social purpose as a mechanism to drive performance, exposing claims of a commitment to staff wellbeing as inauthentic and cynical:

17. Lori Hanau, *The Paradigm Shift to Shared Leadership*, Conscious Company Magazine.

18. William Damon, *The Path to Purpose*, New York: Free Press, 2009.

“IN MY EXPERIENCE, SOME COMPANIES ARE REALLY INTERESTED IN THE WELLBEING OF THEIR EMPLOYEES – AND THERE’S NO DOUBT THAT THIS IS THEIR PRIMARY DRIVER AND MOTIVE. BUT THERE ARE DEFINITELY OTHERS WHO CLAIM AN INTEREST IN SOCIAL PURPOSE AND WELLBEING BUT WHO ARE ACTUALLY MUCH MORE INTERESTED IN PRODUCTIVITY – GETTING THE MOST OUT OF THEIR STAFF. THEY’RE MORE BRUTAL IN THEIR MOTIVES.”

PAUL BUCK
EPIC RISK MANAGEMENT



IMPROVE THE SUPPLY CHAIN

Our research and interviews underline one key finding in relation to supply chains: purpose-driven companies think about the wider ecosystem in which they exist, their place in it, and their reliance and impact on it.

Purpose-driven companies are aware of – and sensitive to – their staff and customers, and *their* families and communities. They look backwards to their supply chains, recognising the value to be gained from working with suppliers and partners in ways that are aligned to a shared sense of value and purpose.



19. The Responsible Down Standard is an independent, voluntary global standard administered by the Textile Exchange [responsibledown.org/about-us/](https://www.responsibledown.org/about-us/).

“IN TODAY’S INTERCONNECTED WORLD, THE ‘TENTACLES’ OF A BUSINESS REACH OUT FAR AND WIDE THROUGH A COMPLEX ECOSYSTEM OF CUSTOMERS, CONSUMERS, SUPPLIERS, PARTNERS, EMPLOYEES, COMMUNITIES AND NATURAL RESOURCES. HAVING PURPOSE AT YOUR HEART REQUIRES BEING TRUE TO YOUR MISSION FOR EVERYONE, EVERYWHERE THAT YOUR BUSINESS TOUCHES.”

SARAH REDSHAW
WATERAID

The outdoor brand The North Face believes that its success is inextricably linked to the responsible management of the natural world – the outdoors so beloved by their customer base. As part of its *Mindful Processing and Manufacturing* programme, The North Face developed a new approach to managing the farming and production of down (a key insulation element in its garments and products) with the Textile Exchange. The *Responsible Down Standard (RDS)*¹⁹ promotes positive animal welfare and traceability in the supply chain, and has been rolled out to other manufacturers in the sector, free of charge.

This open-source approach to supply chain management exemplifies the shared value approach of a genuinely purpose-driven business.

**“IF WE WANT OUR CUSTOMERS TO
‘NEVER STOP EXPLORING’ WE HAVE
TO BE CUSTODIANS OF THE NATURAL
WORLD... THAT IS ABSOLUTELY
ABOUT CHAMPIONING SUSTAINABILITY
THROUGHOUT OUR OWN SUPPLY CHAIN,
BUT BY GIVING THE RESPONSIBLE DOWN
STANDARD TO THE WIDER INDUSTRY WE
CAN MAKE A MUCH BIGGER IMPACT.”**

JULIAN LINGS
THE NORTH FACE

BE SUSTAINABLE

Our wider research underlined that acting with purpose also means working in ways that improve (or at least minimise) environmental impact – often with the belief that doing so is good for the long-term survival and health of the business.²⁰

Unilever is a well-known pioneer in this field, but substantial investment has also been made by businesses including McDonalds, Marks & Spencer and PepsiCo, all of whom are working with their supply chains to reduce waste and pollution.²¹

Sports brand Puma has a rigorous and transparent sustainability programme that is deeper and more comprehensive than most manufacturers, covering economic, social and environmental wellbeing under the banner of *Forever Faster*. Puma introduced the world's first ever Environmental Profit and Loss Account (E P&L), which measures the cost of everything it produces in terms of impact on the natural world. Significantly, Puma uses the language of purpose – not just sustainability – to frame its commitments:

'Working towards a more just and sustainable future, accelerating positive change in the industry and the world'

Protecting the natural world must surely be central to a company's purpose – but the idea of sustainability should go further. Interviewees fed back that a business genuinely living its social purpose is powerful because employees, suppliers, customers and other stakeholders all unite around – and act in line with – shared goals that are explicitly intended to strengthen and sustain all of the communities, environments and ecosystems within which the business exists.

A point also made by management consultancy McKinsey in their analysis of Wal-Mart's ambitious sustainability policies:

*"These [renewable energy and zero waste] initiatives not only safeguard the environment and the sustainability of Wal-Mart's products, but also reduce energy costs and help the company build deeper relationships with local communities."*²²

20. Sheila Bonini and Steven Swartz, *Profits with purpose: How organizing for sustainability can benefit the bottom line*, McKinsey on Sustainability and Resource Productivity, July 2014, p.10.

21. Paul Polman, *Business, society, and the future of capitalism*, McKinsey Quarterly, May 2014 mckinsey.com/business-functions/sustainability-and-resource-productivity/our-insights/business-society-and-the-future-of-capitalism.

22. McKinsey & Company, *Shaping the Future: Solving Social Problems through Business Strategy*, 2010.

“IT IS INHERENT IN LEGO THAT WE WANT TO TRY FOR THE BEST, WHETHER THAT’S PRODUCT SAFETY, PRODUCT QUALITY [OR] BEING GOOD AT THE THINGS WE DO AND HOW WE WORK TOGETHER. IT’S ABOUT BEING A GOOD PLACE TO WORK FOR EMPLOYEES, BEING A GREAT PARTNER TO OUR SUPPLIERS AND CUSTOMERS, LIVING AND HAVING A POSITIVE IMPACT ON THE PLANET. SO IT’S NOT JUST WITHIN PRODUCTS BUT ALSO THE WAY WE INTERACT WITH THE WORLD.”

LENE FRIIS
LEGO

MAKE THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE

Participants agreed that among people who work with purpose-driven companies, it is common to encounter the belief that acting with purpose is simply *the right thing to do*.

These people often see their own wellbeing as something more than a purely economic construct. They understand that their own wellbeing is tied to the wellbeing of the business they work with and inextricably entwined with the wellbeing of everyone and everything else.

“FROM OUR PERSPECTIVE AS A UNIVERSITY EDUCATING THE WORKFORCE OF THE FUTURE, PURPOSE IS BECOMING INCREASINGLY IMPORTANT. STUDENTS OBVIOUSLY NEED TECHNICAL SKILLS – THE ‘HOW’ – BUT MORE AND MORE THEY’RE ASKING ABOUT THE ‘WHY’. WHY SHOULD I WORK FOR A COMPANY THAT DOESN’T DO SOMETHING ABOVE AND BEYOND JUST PROVIDING A PAY CHEQUE?”

NICK PETFORD
VICE-CHANCELLOR, UNIVERSITY OF NORTHAMPTON



It is these people who believe that businesses should make a positive impact on individuals, communities and the world at large. They believe in solving problems (not just avoiding them) and in maximizing the good. It is these people who not only commit their own businesses to purpose but who also encourage and lobby others to do so – often with extraordinary ambition.

“A massive prize awaits business if it successfully ushers in an era of shared prosperity and increased sustainability.”

Mark Malloch-Brown, Co-Chair, Global Commission for Business and Sustainable Development

“There is no business case for enduring poverty. Business can unlock trillions of dollars through new markets, investments and innovation - but to do so we must challenge our current practices and address poverty, inequality and environmental challenges. Every business will benefit from operating in a more equitable, resilient world if we achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.”

Paul Polman, CEO, Unilever



DOING PURPOSE-DRIVEN BUSINESS

When asked to provide advice for those wanting to become (more) purpose-driven, participants gave feedback which can be captured around five main talking points:



1. ARTICULATE YOUR PURPOSE

Although a statement of a company's values, vision and mission is widely regarded as insufficient – and can often belie a business's true purpose – a clear articulation, awareness and understanding of the company's values, vision and mission (across the organisation) is an essential component of a purpose-driven business.

In particular, a deep, compelling purpose will arise from leaders' refusal to accept the *status quo*. By rejecting business thinking that only prioritises profit – and committing to different, broader outcomes – purpose-driven businesses are often inherently more innovative and ambitious than their more traditional counterparts.

"Entrepreneurs who are truly change makers must be highly creative and able to look at a problem or opportunity from a completely new angle. This is summed up by something Robert Kennedy, one of my political heroes, said: 'Some men see things as they are and ask "Why?" I see the things that never were and ask "Why not?"'"

Paul Lindley, Ella's Kitchen

While there is consensus that the purpose agenda needs to be owned and driven from the top, our wider research threw up the challenge of achieving this against the day-to-day backdrop of doing international business.

*"How do you manage to convey a sense of meaning when your workforce might be scattered in four continents, when the project that you're working on might take five years to complete, when you keep losing thread of what it is you're doing? We need to become better storytellers."*²³

Alain de Botton

This can take substantial courage and effort on the part of the company's leadership – and significant open-mindedness and investment by the body of the organisation.

23. Taken from Alain De Botton's keynote speech at 2015's *Business Wise* conference.

2. EMBED YOUR PURPOSE

Beyond *articulating* your purpose, it is essential to *embed* your purpose in the mindsets, actions and culture of your organisation. Moving past rhetoric to make your purpose *lived* is often one of the hardest challenges to overcome.

To do so, it is important to give people time, space and incentives to contribute to – and act on – the company’s purpose as they deal with the day-to-day realities of their job. With this in mind, the thoughtful use of events and other rituals can be helpful – interviewees emphasised the importance of organisational structure, personal objectives, KPIs, training and appraisals, as well as staff recognition, awards and rewards.

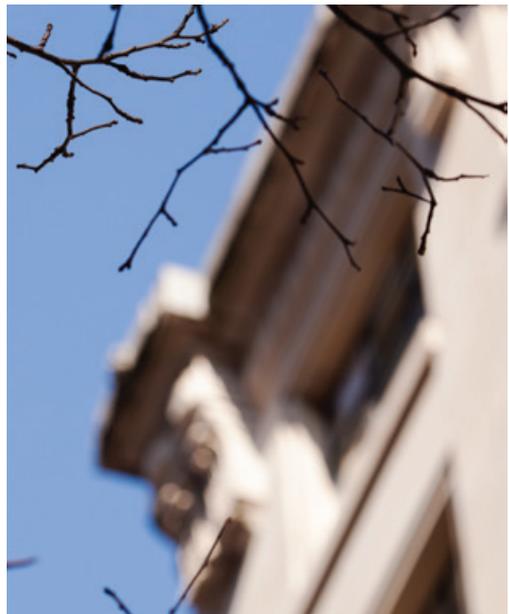
“THE DIFFICULT PIECE IS WIRING THE ORGANISATION SO THAT CONTRIBUTING TO THE PURPOSE IS FELT IN EVERY ROLE. IT’S ABOUT DESIGNING THE ORGANISATIONAL MECHANICS – COMMUNICATIONS, JOB CONTENT, RECOGNITION, TARGET SETTING, DEVELOPMENT, RECRUITMENT, LEADERSHIP AND WAYS OF WORKING... IT’S ABOUT HOW ALL THE PIECES FIT TOGETHER TO CONNECT EVERYDAY WORK TO YOUR PURPOSE.”

SARAH REDSHAW
WATERAID

Legal policies and structures – such as the emergence of B Corps (Benefit Corporations) – are examples of the growing desire to cement the commitment to purpose in law.

B Corp certification is granted by B Lab, a not-for-profit body that evaluates a for-profit business’s performance against rigorous social and environmental criteria. B Corps are growing in number internationally, with more than 1600 businesses in 41 countries now certified, and the movement is gaining traction across every industry, from fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) through to financial and professional services.²⁴

24. Statistics taken from B Lab’s website, March 2016, bcorporation.net.



**“WE HAVE A COMPETENCY
FRAMEWORK THAT COVERS OUR
VOLUNTEERS, OUR STAFF AND
OUR SENIOR LEADERSHIP TEAM...
SO IT GOES RIGHT THROUGH
THE ORGANISATION AND IS ALL
BASED ON AND BUILT AROUND
OUR VALUES.”**

STACEY ADAMS
RALEIGH INTERNATIONAL

3. COMMUNICATE WITH PURPOSE

Central to the ability to embed purpose in a business will be the business's ability to communicate effectively with its staff, suppliers, partners, shareholders and customers.

Participants suggest that this is increasingly important in today's hyper-connected world, in which people can celebrate or decimate a brand at frightening speed and at a previously unimaginable scale.

The VW emissions scandal was cited as an example of serious misalignment with core purpose that has had far-reaching consequences for one of the most trusted global brands. If a brand is a promise, VW has broken that promise, and international consultancy Brand Finance estimate that the company has lost \$10bn in brand value since the scandal broke, suggesting that its fall from grace could even threaten Germany's position as the world's most trusted engineering and manufacturing nation.

“HOW LONG WOULD IT HAVE TAKEN TO DISCOVER THAT ALL YOUR DIESEL ENGINES ARE LIES 20 YEARS AGO? HOW LONG WOULD IT HAVE HELD OFF? HOW LONG WOULD THAT STORY HAVE TAKEN TO BREAK? HOW LONG BEFORE IT BECAME AN ABSOLUTE CRISIS? WHAT'S THE DELTA BETWEEN DISCOVERING AND LOSING THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE 20 YEARS AGO? I SUSPECT A LOT LONGER.”

ANTHONY LILLEY OBE



**LET'S KEEP MAKING #LIKEAGIRL
MEAN AMAZING THINGS.**

In commercial terms, a disconnect between a stated purpose and actual business behaviour can be catastrophic, but we note this also extends into the not-for-profit sector, where actions that contradict stated charitable aims can jar even more painfully.

This can be seen in Age UK and E.ON's ill-fated partnership – offering donors and beneficiaries 'deals' on their energy bills – which, although hastily withdrawn, has resulted in serious reputational damage.

At the other end of the spectrum, our research revealed that articulating your purpose authentically, clearly and in a compelling way can be positively transformative.

The ongoing and hugely successful *Like a Girl* campaign run by Always tackles sexism manifested in commonly-used language. By reflecting the experiences of its customers and taking a position on an issue that matters to them, the brand has connected with its heartland on a deep level and made a significant contribution to fighting pervasive, underlying sexist attitudes.

Elsewhere, in a move of almost unimaginable boldness aimed at challenging rampant consumerism and disposable fashion, on Black Friday in 2011 Patagonia took out a full-page advert in the *New York Times*, urging customers: 'Don't buy this jacket.'

The copy went on to outline in detail the full – and shocking – environmental cost of producing the garment featured in the ad. It concludes:

"There is much to be done and plenty for us all to do. Don't buy what you don't need. Think twice before you buy anything."

This is perhaps the pinnacle of authentic, purpose-driven communication, where a brand's commitment to its purpose drives a campaign encouraging consumers to buy *less* of their product.

Opposite page:
#LikeAGirl, Always/P&G

This page:
Don't Buy This Jacket, Patagonia



4. RECRUIT FOR PURPOSE

The increasing importance of purpose in relation to the competition for talent was touched on above. Of course, the process of recruiting with – and for – purpose is easier said than done, but there are recommendations, for example:

Have a great purpose.

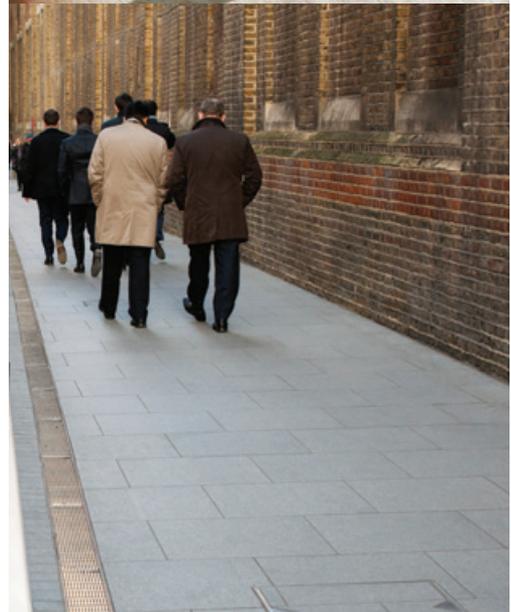
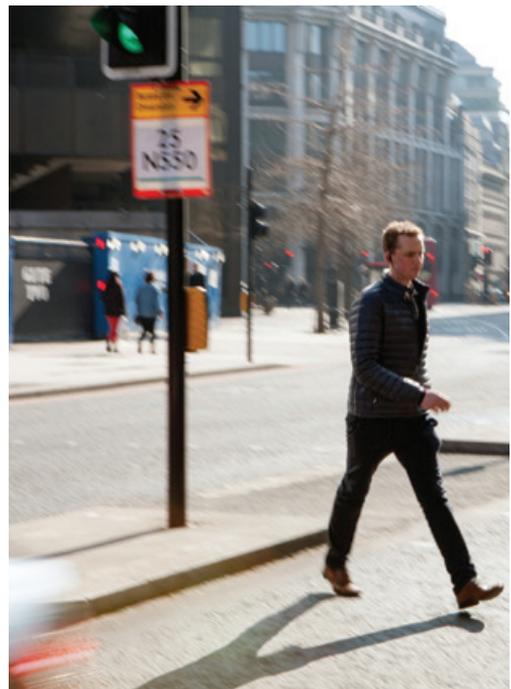
“THE MOST TALENTED PEOPLE HAVE A CHOICE. BEING IN AN ORGANISATION THAT YOU’RE PROUD OF, BEING ABLE TO COME BACK TO YOUR FAMILY AND SAY ‘YES, I’M HAPPY TO BE HERE BECAUSE MY BUSINESS IS DOING THE RIGHT THING,’ THAT’S WHAT MAKES TALENTED PEOPLE STAY.”

CARL FITZSIMONS
THAI UNION

Be authentic.

“IT’S REALLY IMPORTANT TO BE AUTHENTIC WHEN YOU’RE TALKING TO PEOPLE ABOUT WHAT IT IS YOU STAND FOR, WHAT YOU’RE TRYING TO ACHIEVE – YOU THEN GET THE RIGHT PEOPLE INTO THE ORGANISATION.”

DAN JOY
IKANO BANK



“THEY ALL WANT TO EARN GOOD MONEY, BUT THEY ARE INTERESTED IN THINGS BEYOND THAT. THEY ARE INTERESTED IN WHETHER THEY ARE DOING THINGS WITH INTEGRITY, WHETHER THERE IS OPPORTUNITY FOR CREATIVITY, WHETHER THEY’RE ACTUALLY GOING TO CREATE SOMETHING OF GENUINE SUSTAINED VALUE AND WHETHER THE PEOPLE THEY ARE WORKING WITH ARE DOING THAT – AND DOING THAT WITH INTEGRITY.”

ADRIAN WALKER
HOGAN LOVELLS

Our wider research touched upon the importance of screening candidates for purpose, with research company Imperative and New York University’s *2015 Workforce Purpose Index* arguing that:

“Purpose-Oriented Workers show up at work in a big way. They thrive as employees and human beings at significantly higher levels in every measure... Purpose-Driven Workers are the foundation for successful organizations, a thriving economy, and healthy society overall.”²⁵

Participants also talked about clarity around the ‘why’ as key to the success of any endeavour, and communicating your purpose internally can lead to powerful – even transformational – change as it motivates employees at a deep emotional level.



“I TRULY BELIEVE THAT WITHOUT A ‘WHY’ THAT CENTRES ON MEANINGFUL PURPOSE, A COMPANY CANNOT GROW. OFTEN WE LOOK FOR CORPORATE VALUES THAT GENERALISE, BUT UNTIL THE PURPOSE IS THE CENTRAL AUTHENTIC NARRATIVE, THOSE VALUES ARE MEANINGLESS.”

GURTEJ SANDHU
CEO, QS UNISOLUTION

25. In partnership with New York University, research company Imperative conducted an *Organizational Purpose Index* for LinkedIn and surveyed more than 2,000 employees across the globe. Full report available at issuu.com/imperative2015/docs/index_updated10.

5. MEASURE PURPOSE

Interviewees touched on purpose-driven companies committing to objectives that align with and reinforce their purpose. They measure their performance against these objectives and they report openly and comprehensively on their performance.

In this context, performance also covers culture, in other words what does it feel like to work in this organisation? Attitudes and behaviours, the way people treat each other, is as important as sustainability or procurement policies. Put simply, if your culture is disconnected with your purpose, you cannot hope to achieve your commercial or impact objectives.²⁶

“THE OLD IDEA OF DRAWING A LINE BETWEEN OUR WORK IDENTITY AND PERSONAL IDENTITY IS FADING. AS PEW REPORTED, MILLENNIALS ARE VERY EXPRESSIVE AND OPEN TO CHANGE. THIS CAN BE DISTURBING TO THE OLD GUARD BUT IF YOU LOOK AT ANY MILLENNIAL-RUN ORGANIZATION, THEY HAVE A CULTURE WHERE YOU ARE NOT ONLY ALLOWED TO BE HUMAN AT WORK BUT IT IS EXPECTED OF YOU EVERY DAY.”

AARON HURST
AUTHOR AND ENTREPRENEUR

Our wider research led us to The Body Shop as a pioneer in purpose-driven business. It has long placed its commitment to making a positive impact at the heart of its operations and its proposition – a commitment amply reflected in its reporting.

“Instead of being driven by comparisons with our past performance, competitors or industry standards, our Enrich Not Exploit Commitment is inspired by the needs of our planet and its people. This is not simply about doing less harm, but rather about actively working toward a clear destination: a future in which humanity and other life can flourish on Earth forever.”

The Body Shop's 2016 sustainability report

This is easier for businesses created with purpose in mind. As participants remarked, for those looking to reform or deepen their purpose, honest and sometimes painful reflection will be required to drive meaningful change.

26. In one study, organisational culture was credited with a 29% variation in productivity levels between companies. Malcolm G Patterson et al, Impact of People Management Practices on Business Performance, Issues in People Management, Institute of Personal Development, 1998, p. 10.

“CHANGE BEGINS WITH THE COURAGE TO ACKNOWLEDGE REALITY. OUR BRAND, OUR EMPLOYEES, OUR CUSTOMERS – WHAT ARE WE ACTUALLY SAYING AND DOING? WHAT DOES OUR GUT TELL US? WHAT DOES THE DATA SHOW US? HONESTLY FACING OUR STRENGTHS (AND OUR SHADOWS) SEEMS ESSENTIAL IF WE’RE TO CLOSE THE GAP BETWEEN INTENTION AND ACTION.”

NATALIE HORNE
FOUNDER, PRIME DECISION

THE SPECTRE OF PURPOSE WASH

Perhaps the most striking theme to emerge from our interviews was a fear that the purpose agenda could be derailed by some businesses tilting towards *purpose wash*, where claims are inauthentic or – worse – deliberately manufactured to take advantage of a trend.

“I’M NOT SURE HOW MUCH THE RISE OF PURPOSE IS A DELIBERATE ‘WE MUST DO GOOD,’ AND HOW MUCH IS ‘WE NEED TO BE SEEN TO BE DOING GOOD.’ THE VALUE THAT COMES FROM PORTRAYING AN IMAGE OF DOING GOOD CAN EASILY OUTSTRIP A SMALL – AND OFTEN UN-IMPACTFUL – INVESTMENT IN CSR.”

MATTHEW ANDERSON
TVET UK

The sentiment is reminiscent of *greenwash*, where PR and marketing are used to give a false appearance of environmental friendliness.

“WE WANT A WORLD WHERE PEOPLE ARE TRYING TO FIND A PURPOSE, THAT’S GREAT, BUT THERE ARE COMPANIES THAT ARE ADDING IT AS A SORT OF LAST LICK OF PAINT. AN EQUIVALENT TO GREENWASHING HAS DEFINITELY BECOME PURPOSE WASHING.”

NICOLE VANDERBILT
ETSY

“THE QUESTION THAT I WOULD ASK IS WHETHER IT’S REAL. SO, IS THERE A THIN VENEER OF AUTHENTICITY AND WANTING TO DO THE RIGHT THING, OR IS IT PROPERLY EMBEDDED IN THE ORGANISATION? IF YOU ALLOW A GROUP OF MARKETERS OR SENIOR EXECUTIVES TO GO AND CONJURE UP A NEW OR REVISED PURPOSE IN A DARKENED ROOM YOU’RE ON A HIDING TO NOTHING.”

DAN JOY
IKANO BANK

Participants were clear that purpose must be authentic. If it isn't – and purpose becomes yet another jaded, over-used piece of corporate jargon – the movement's potential for change could be seriously undermined.

“GIVE ME THE UNADULTERATED, UNAPOLOGETIC, UNETHICAL CAPITALIST ANY DAY, BECAUSE YOU KNOW THE NATURE OF THE BEAST YOU'RE DEALING WITH. WHEN GREED COVERS ITSELF IN LAMB'S CLOTHING AND PRETENDS TO BE SOMETHING ELSE – THAT'S DANGEROUS.”

CAL COURTNEY
LONDON SCHOOL OF BUSINESS & MANAGEMENT

“THE DANGER IS 'PURPOSE' BECOMES A THROWAWAY LINE THAT IS PASSIVELY MENTIONED IN THE SAME WAY THAT CORPORATE VALUES OFTEN CAN BE... PURPOSE NEEDS TO BE ACTIVELY LIVED.”

JULIAN LINGS
THE NORTH FACE

More and more businesses and organisations from every conceivable sector are adopting purpose as a frame for what they do, and with its explicit emphasis on shared value, purpose holds the promise of a more equitable, sustainable and fulfilling model of consumption, work and business for everyone.

But there are major risks associated with mass adoption that arise from opportunistic bandwagon-jumping and a misunderstanding – wilful or otherwise – of the level of commitment required to be truly purpose-driven:

“IF WE TRY TO GENERATE PURPOSE IN ORGANISATIONS WITHOUT REFLECTING ON THE DEPTH AND BREADTH OF PURPOSE CAPACITY, WE WILL AT BEST BE MYTHMAKING AND AT WORST EMBEDDING ORGANISATIONAL DISHONESTY.”

MATTHEW TAYLOR
RSA

WHAT NEXT?

PURPOSE IN PRACTICE IS NOT INTENDED TO OFFER A DEFINITIVE ANALYSIS OF THE COMPLEX ISSUES COVERED. RATHER, OUR AIM IS TO STIMULATE CONVERSATION, CATALYSE ENQUIRY AND, ULTIMATELY, HELP MORE COMPANIES BECOME AUTHENTICALLY PURPOSE-DRIVEN.

Our findings to date are clear on a number of points:

- Purpose needs leadership – but it must be woven throughout a business’s organisation, processes and culture
- Mission statements are helpful – but purpose goes much further and is rooted in commitments to others, including individuals, communities and the world at large
- Claims of being purpose-driven are important – but inauthentic claims threaten the whole purpose movement.

Minimising the risk of purpose wash should be an explicit aim of businesses that care about the movement. And it’s for this reason that Claremont is committed to building on this report, with a series of publications, events and other activities that will give voice to people who genuinely care about purpose-driven business.

We would like to thank all of those who have contributed so far and hope you will join us.



FURTHER READING

QUICK READS

The Rediscovery and Valuing of People Power, Robin Chase, CEO, Zipcar

The Paradigm Shift to Shared Leadership: From Round Earth to Flat Hierarchies, Lori Hannau, Global Round Table Leadership

Purpose-driven organisations far outperform traditional for-profit businesses, Andrew Hewitt, Founder, GameChangers500

Millenials Work for Purpose not Paycheck, Karl Moore, Desautels Faculty McGill University

The Values Revolution: Embedding Empathy in the New Economy, Ai-Jen Poo, Founder and Director, National Domestic Workers Alliance

Universities are Failing to Prepare Students for the Social Economy, David Reed, Director, Generation Change

Millenials and Purpose: The Message is Clear for Business Leaders, Punit Renjen, CEO, Deloitte Global

What is the Purpose of Business, Isabella Rimanoczy, Partner, Leadership in Motion

The Power of Purpose, Mark Weinberger, Global Chairman, EY

Beyond Profit, Graham Brown-Martin, Founder, Learning Without Frontiers

Do Purpose: Why Brands with a Purpose Do Better and Matter More, David Hiatt

DEEP THINKING

Balancing Purpose and Profit: Legal mechanisms to lock in social mission for “profit with purpose” businesses across the G8, Thomson Reuters Foundation, UnLtd and Orrick, 2014

Combining Profit and Purpose: A new dialogue on the role of business in society, Coca Cola Enterprises 2014

Culture of Purpose: Building Business Confidence, Driving Growth, Deloitte, 2014

The Deloitte Millennial Survey 2016: Winning over the next generation of leaders, Deloitte, 2016

Profits With Purpose: How organizing for sustainability can benefit the bottom line, McKinsey 2014

The Business Case for Purpose, Harvard Business Review and EY, 2016

The Future of Capitalism, Paul Polman, CEO, Unilever

The Performance Frontier: Innovating for a sustainable business Strategy, Robert Eccles and George Serafeim, Harvard Business Review

CREDITS

DIGITAL RESOURCES

purposegeneration.com/millennials/

Global Commission on Business and Sustainable Development

Video: *Reinventing the Planet*, Josie Maran, Josie Maran Cosmetics

Video: *Find your purpose and put it to work*, Harvard Business Review

Blog: *Introducing What's Working: Purpose + Profit*, Arianna Huffington, Huffington Post

THANK YOU

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We'd like to thank all of our interviewees for their time, thoughts and generosity.

If you would like to get involved with Purpose in Practice as it evolves please contact Henry Playfoot at Claremont Communications – we'd love to hear from you.

CLAREMONT

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