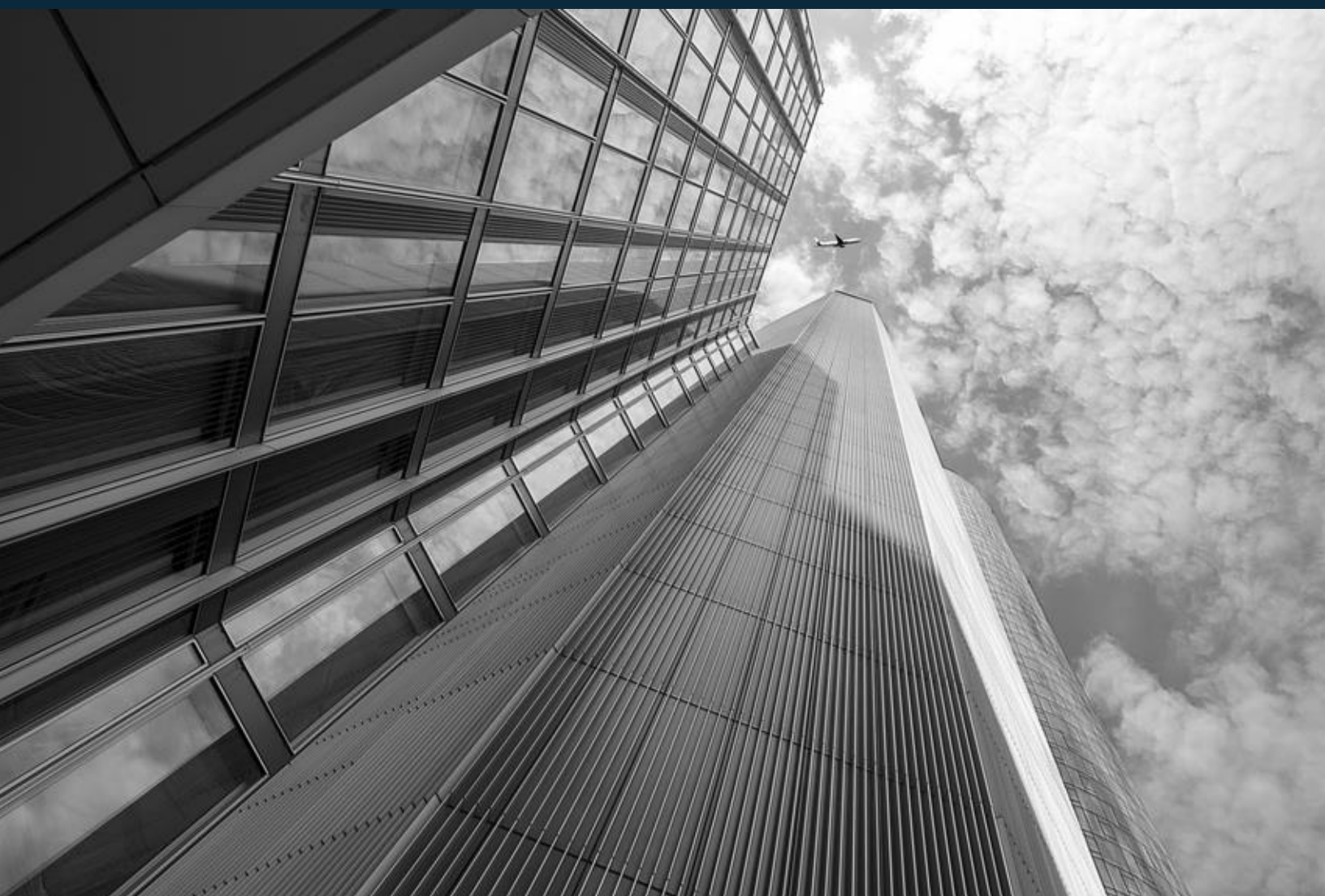# PURPOSE TRENDS REPORT

A selection of what has been published about Purpose in December 2025

December 2025

Garcia de Santos, T.; Florez-Jimenez, M.P. & Lleo, A.
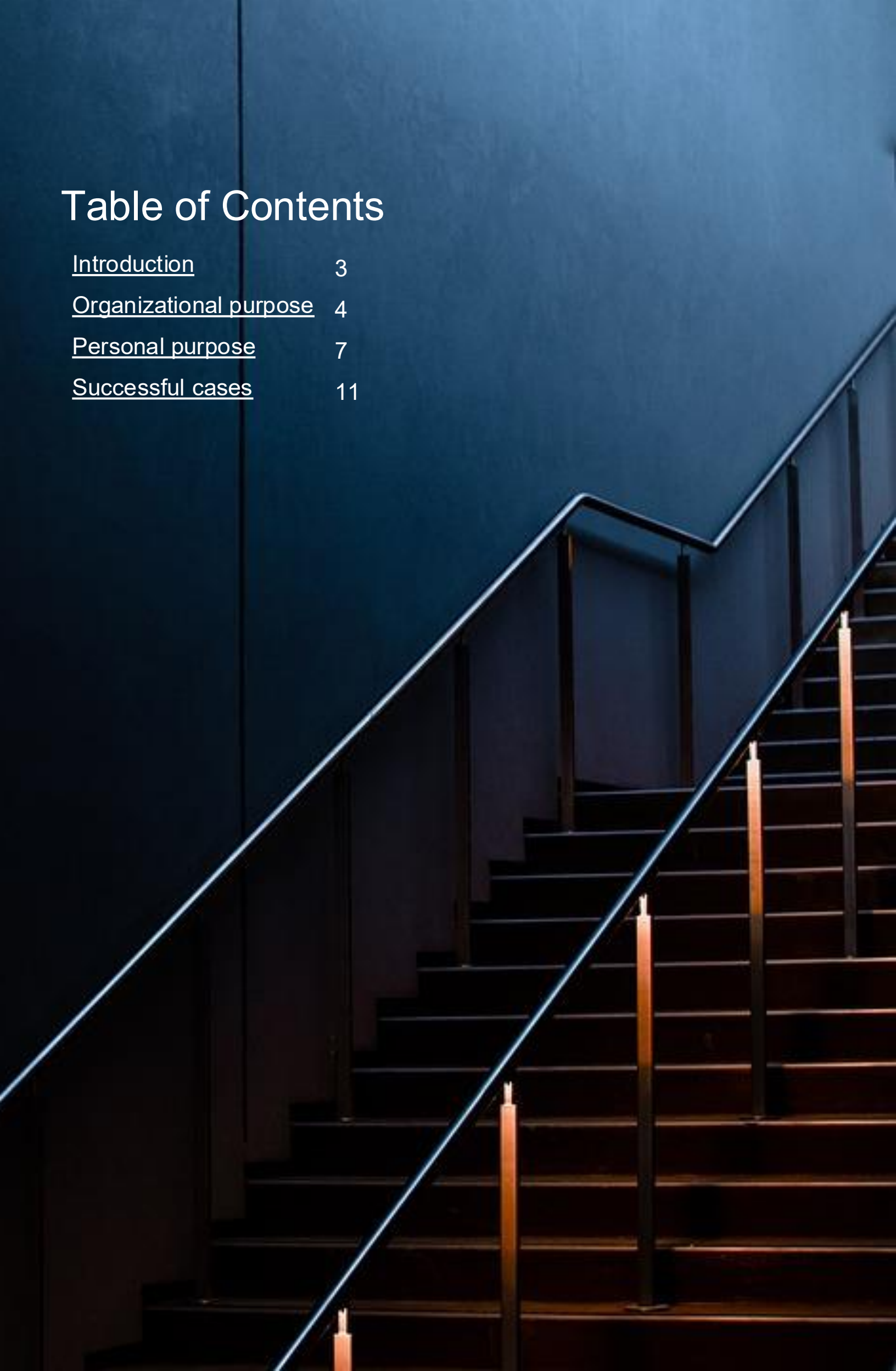School of Economics and Business. University of Navarra

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INTRODUCTION

*In this report, we want to synthesize the most relevant about corporate purpose published in December 2025. For this aim, we did a content search (using selected keywords) in Scopus and Google Scholar for academic publications; and diffusion magazines and other trusted sites for articles and reports. We selected relevant publications about organizational purpose and personal purpose. Also, we include successful cases that show how corporate purpose has been implemented. Bellow, we present statistics about the selected literature.*

ACADEMIC PUBLICATIONS - DECEMBER 2025

■ Empirical

ORGANIZATIONAL PURPOSE	PERSONAL PURPOSE
3	3
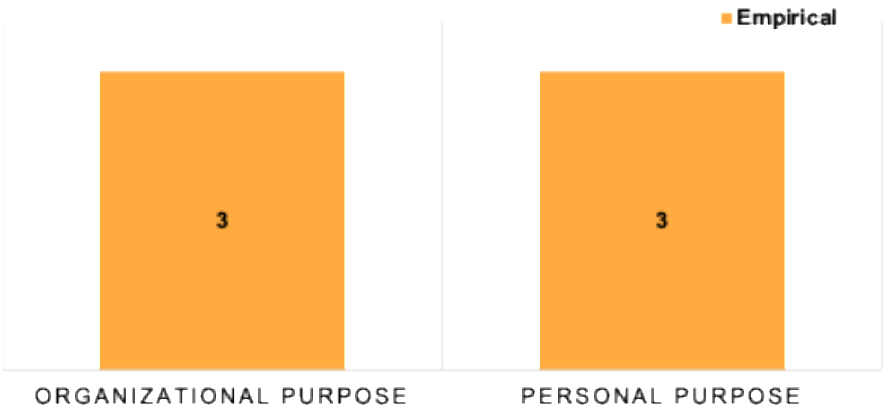
ARTICLES AND REPORTS - DECEMBER 2025

■ Interview
■ Descriptive

ORGANIZATIONAL PURPOSE	PERSONAL PURPOSE	SUCCESSFUL CASES
1	1	1
2	3	1
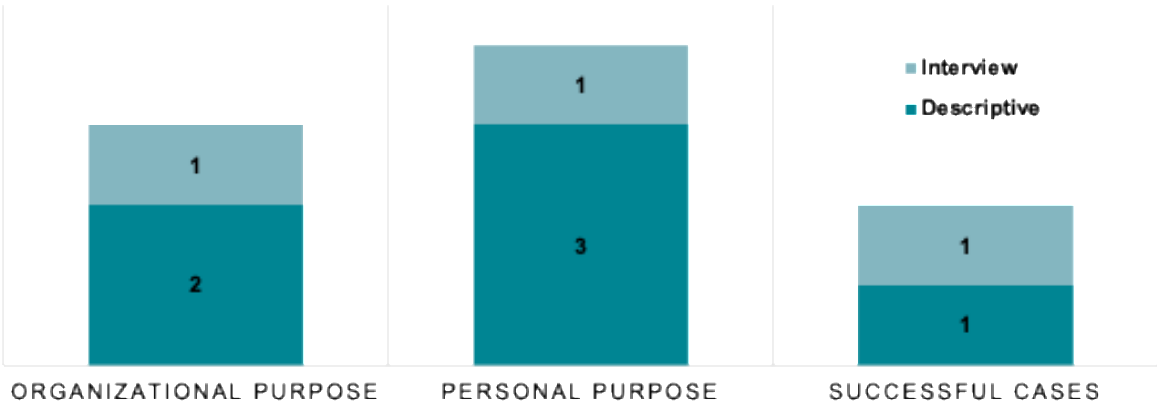
This month's literature on organizational purpose explore how when it is shared across managers, it can create a "common purpose advantage," how leaders' epiphanic experiences can trigger a shift toward social profit orientation, and how executives frame purpose in strategic, moral, and relational terms. Articles reinforce these insights by stressing that purpose must guide pivots in uncertainty, inform trade-offs and resource allocation, and operate as a growth strategy rather than a slogan. Together, they portray purpose as effective only when it shapes strategy, leadership discourse, and everyday organizational choices.

Research on personal purpose this month highlights that meaningful work satisfies basic psychological needs, buffers the negative effects of emotional demands, and fosters thriving and psychological well-being across demanding contexts. Articles complement these findings by emphasizing meaning as a key driver of employee engagement, career satisfaction, and sustainable performance, especially in hybrid workplaces. Together, these contributions suggest that personal purpose is an outcome shaped by job design, leadership practices, and organizational conditions that allow people to understand why their work matters.

Successful cases show how purpose becomes real when it is translated into clear strategic focus and tangible action. The Frontier Communications case illustrates how a simple, well-articulated purpose helped align strategy, mobilize employees, and support a successful organizational turnaround. Complementing this, the Airstream case demonstrates how brand purpose can be grounded in concrete environmental stewardship, integrating long-term support for public lands into the company's identity and operations.

Academic publications (3)

Social Purpose Formation and Evolution in Nonprofit Organizations

Strategic Management Journal, JCR Q1 see online

Abstract: Research Summary What is the most effective way to distribute organizational objectives across managers? While prior work suggests managers should each focus on a single objective, we draw on Barnard's original insights on corporate purpose to identify conditions when managers pursuing the full set of objectives is advantageous. Using a computational model, we find that moderate strategic diversity amongst managers enables practice sharing to generate sufficiently valuable distant search to offset the additional complexity incurred during local search, creating a "common purpose advantage." The advantage is stronger with fewer objectives, moderate objective correlation, less diversification, and moderate turbulence. Under other conditions, it dissipates or reverses. This work unifies scattered findings on multi-objective firms, contributes to diversification research, and revives interest in the Managerial Theory of the Firm. Managerial Summary How should a firm distribute its objectives across its managers? Should each manager focus on a single objective, or should all collectively pursue the full set? Our research identifies the conditions for a "common purpose advantage," where all managers pursuing the full set of objectives is superior. Using a computational model, we demonstrate this advantage arises when moderate strategic diversity amongst managers enables the sharing of valuable practices, which generates performance gains that offset the complexity of handling multiple goals. This advantage is strongest with fewer objectives, moderate environmental turbulence, and in less diversified firms. Under other conditions-such as high turbulence, many objectives, or high diversification-this advantage dissipates or reverses, making each manager focusing on a single objective more effective.

Purpose ignited: the transformative power of epiphanies in driving social profit orientation

Management Science, JCR Q1 see online

Abstract: Purpose: This study explores how epiphanic experiences – sudden, identity-shifting insights – catalyze service leaders' adoption of a Social Profit Orientation (SPO), defined as a commitment to advancing financial, social and environmental goals simultaneously. By examining the psychological and contextual origins of such moments, the paper illuminates the human dimension behind purpose-driven organizational transformation. Design/methodology/approach: The research involves a reanalysis of qualitative data originally collected for Berry et al. (2025), which included 62 in-depth interviews with leaders from 21 service-focused organizations and extensive archival materials. Using inductive thematic analysis, the study identifies and categorizes epiphanic experiences, producing a typology of four distinct pathways: Personal Crossroads, Immersion, Purposeful Imagination and Intentional Exploration. Findings: The study demonstrates that epiphanic experiences function as inflection points in leadership development, prompting leaders to reconceptualize organizational purpose and commit to SPO. The four identified pathways show how variations in focus and engagement shape the character of epiphanic experiences and their strategic consequences. These insights highlight that systemic transformation often originates in deeply personal leader experiences rather than solely from external pressures or rational strategy. Research limitations/implications: The study is based on retrospective accounts and secondary sources, which may be subject to recall bias. Future longitudinal research is needed to assess the durability of epiphany-driven transformations and their diffusion across organizations and ecosystems. Practical implications: Organizations can design conditions that foster epiphanic insight – such as immersive experiences, reflective practices and exposure to diverse service contexts – to cultivate leadership committed to purpose-driven transformation. Social implications: By highlighting how personal transformations in leaders lead to SPO, the study underscores the potential of leadership development as a pathway for advancing broader societal well-being through service.

How do strategic leaders frame corporate purpose? Investigating competing frames and framing approaches in executive discourse

European Management Review, JCR Q2 [see online](#)

Abstract: Corporate purpose is gaining momentum in contemporary business communities, yet it often appears shrouded in ambiguity. Although research is growing in popularity, the analysis of corporate purpose from the perspective of strategic leaders remains an unexplored domain. Prior research has dealt with purpose primarily at the firm level, while overlooking how strategic leaders make sense of corporate purpose in their discourses. Adopting an inductive approach, we discover competing frames revolving around four dimensions: the emergence of corporate purpose, its temporal perception, the dynamic between purpose and profit, and the distributed nature of purpose. Then we uncover three ideal-typical framing approaches (strategic, moral, and relational) that capture recurrent discursive patterns employed by executives. As such, we advance a perspective on corporate purpose that appreciates its discursive aspects. The study also points to the importance of the cognitive and discursive dimensions of strategic leadership, highlighting the heterogeneity in how leaders frame purpose within their organizations.

> " Because only by following the purpose you make decisions in the company, and based on that you can write your strategy. "

5 Ways Organizations Can Pivot with Purpose

Dana H. Born, Marc Correa and Bill George, HBR see online

Today's business environment is unpredictable, and the challenges leaders face are fast-changing and interconnected. In this world, executives must learn how to "pivot with purpose": to constantly and courageously remain anchored in their values while adjusting to meet new realities. There are five principles to follow in order to do so. First, face reality. Leading through complexity begins with acknowledging uncomfortable truths. Second, stay true to your purpose and values instead of retreating, making reactive choices, or listening to the loudest voice in the room. Third, adapt your strategies and tactics to changing conditions by redirecting resources toward a more promising path without losing your company's core identity. Fourth, rely on your teammates for innovative ideas and creative solutions. Finally, go on offense and focus on winning with new business models.

It's time to rethink 'corporate purpose'

Roger Martin, Fast Company see online

The article argues that the current enthusiasm around corporate purpose has reached a point where many companies tout lofty mission statements without translating them into real business strategy or impact. Purpose shouldn't be an abstract ideal; to matter it must be connected to measurable outcomes and integrated into the core of how a business operates — from governance and metrics to products and strategy. A purpose that only exists in marketing or internal slogans won't generate competitive advantage or long-term value. Instead, leaders should rethink purpose as something that must be demonstrable and actionable, aligning social impact with economic performance. Companies that successfully bridge this gap can achieve sustainability and resilience, while others risk purpose fading into a buzzword with little practical effect.

> " If a purpose statement does not meaningfully guide trade-offs, resource allocation, and competitive positioning, then it is not doing any real work. "

Purpose Can Indeed Be A Growth Strategy

Dan Pontefract, Forbes see online

The article argues that while corporate purpose has become a popular term in boardrooms, it is often treated superficially — showcased in town halls and media but ignored when hard business decisions unfold. Real purpose, the author says, must be more than rhetoric; it should operate as the "operating system" of a business that influences strategy, incentive structures and decision-making, rather than being sidelined when it conflicts with quarterly targets or cost cuts. When purpose is merely symbolic, employees become cynical and disengaged; but when it genuinely guides how a company grows, allocates resources, treats stakeholders and measures success, it can become a sustainable driver of growth and competitive advantage. The piece ultimately calls on leaders to ensure purpose is deeply embedded and operationalized, so it meaningfully shapes corporate behavior instead of serving as a superficial accessory.

Academic publications (3)

Do back-of-house hospitality hybrid workers in Hong Kong enjoy work-family enrichment? A two-wave study on meaningful work and psychological needs

Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Insights, JCR Q1 see online

Abstract: Purpose: This study investigates how meaningful work (MW) influences the three basic psychological needs, which, in turn, affect the four dimensions of hybrid working. It further explores how these outcomes contribute to work-family enrichment (WFE) among back-of-house employees in Hong Kong's hospitality industry, a critical yet under-researched segment. Design/ methodology/ approach: Data collected from 332 back-of-house employees in Hong Kong's hospitality sector using a two-wave survey design were analyzed via the partial least squares structural equation modeling. Findings: The results showed that MW positively influences the three basic psychological needs for autonomy, relatedness and competency. Only fulfilling the needs for autonomy positively influences the four dimensions of hybrid working (i.e. job effectiveness, well-being, relationship with organization and work-life balance). However, fulfilling other basic psychological needs showed differential results. Among the four dimensions of hybrid working, job effectiveness, well-being and relationship with the organization enrich the work-family domain. Practical implications: This study improves our knowledge on hybrid workers' work-family dynamics. Specifically, it highlights how MW and the fulfillment of basic psychological needs - particularly autonomy - enhance hybrid work outcomes such as job effectiveness, well-being and employee-organization relationships and in turn, positively influence WFE. This study also offers suggestions on how organizations can design a positive hybrid work experience that is especially valuable for hospitality employers seeking to retain and motivate back-of-house talent in a competitive labor market. Originality/value: This study is among the first few studies that include hybrid working, basic psychological needs and WFE in one model. At the same time, this study extended literature by incorporating MW, an increasingly relevant constructs transforming workplaces.

Emotional demands and depression: The buffering role of positive work-related factors in clinical veterinary practice

Veterinary Record, JCR Q2 see online

Abstract: Background: Emotional demands are high in the veterinary profession. In this study, we examine whether positive factors buffer (i.e., weaken) the association between emotional demands and depression among veterinary employees. Methods: We surveyed psychosocial working conditions and depression in a population of 885 employees in clinical veterinary practice. The data were analysed using logistic regression analysis. Results: An increased risk of depression was found for participants reporting high emotional demands (odds ratio [OR] 4.21; 95% confidence interval [CI] 2.68-6.60). Participants reporting high emotional demands in combination with low levels of meaning at work (OR 5.08; 95% CI 2.64-9.79), cooperation with their immediate supervisor (OR 4.09; 95% CI 2.27-6.45), influence at work (OR 3.69; 95% CI 2.11-6.45) and cooperation between colleagues (OR 3.85; 95% CI 2.04-7.28) had an increased risk of depression compared to participants reporting high emotional demands in combination with high levels of the above-mentioned factors. A statistically significant buffering effect for the combination of high emotional demands and high meaning at work was observed (relative excess risk due to interaction -3.35; 95% CI -6.40 to -0.30). Limitation: This was a cross-sectional study, meaning that causal associations between the variables cannot be established. Conclusions: High levels of meaning at work buffered the association between emotional demands and the risk of depression in the study population. Positive work-related factors are important for promoting wellbeing among employees in clinical veterinary practice.

Meaningful work, psychological well-being, thriving at work and patient aggression: testing a moderated-mediation model

Abstract: Drawing on the socially embedded theory of thriving, our article investigates the mediating role of thriving at work between work meaningfulness and psychological well-being (PWB). It also examines patient aggression as a moderator of the effect of work meaningfulness on thriving at work. Data were collected from 103 employees working in private hospitals in Northern Cyprus and analyzed via structural equation modeling. The results indicated that work meaningfulness has a significant impact on PWB mediated via thriving at work. Moreover, the findings revealed the positive effect of work meaningfulness on thriving at work in low-aggression contexts. To our knowledge, this study is the first to assess thriving at work as a mediator linking work meaningfulness and PWB, highlighting the moderating role of patient aggression in a single study. Based on the paper's findings, theoretical and managerial implications, as well as future research suggestions, were discussed.

> " Meaningful work energizes employees, enhances their personal growth, and promotes their psychological well-being "

Employee Engagement in 2026: Definition, Importance, Drivers, Strategies & Examples

Vantage Circle see online

The article explains that employee engagement—the emotional and psychological investment employees make in their work—is driven by multiple factors, including purpose and meaning. Workers who understand why their work matters and how it contributes to a bigger picture are more likely to be deeply engaged. Alongside purpose, other key drivers include role clarity, growth and development opportunities, recognition, emotional safety, autonomy, wellbeing support, and belonging. The article highlights that low engagement leads to decreased productivity, absenteeism, turnover, and poor performance outcomes. Modern organisations must therefore build conditions that allow employees to find meaning and connection in their roles, rather than relying on ad hoc perks.

> **"** When employees gain clarity about their role and understand its connection to organizational goals, they develop a sense of purpose, which in turn motivates them **"**

A Search for Daily Meaning: Building a Purpose-Driven Career

Winnie Jiang and Antoine Tirard, INSEAD Knowledge see online

The article argues that in today's rapidly changing work landscape, a sense of purpose is central to job satisfaction and wellbeing, especially for younger generations who view purpose as essential to meaningful work. Finding purpose at work requires self-reflection and an ongoing search rather than a quick fix. The authors suggest three core questions to guide this process: what brings you joy, what you are good at, and how you want to serve others. They propose five "pillars of meaningful work": livelihood, community, recognition, stimulation, and impact, which individuals can use to clarify career decisions. The article also shows that purpose often emerges over time through reflection, skills development, and proactive career shaping.

Work, work, work in the age of AI: Rethinking work hours as performance metric

Nidheesh Joseph, The Economic Times see online

The article argues that traditional work metrics based on hours logged are becoming outdated in the age of AI, as automation reshapes how value is created in the workplace. Despite leaders advocating for long hours and cultural norms that view overwork as a badge of honor, younger professionals are increasingly prioritizing meaning, balance, and work-life integration. AI has the potential to automate routine tasks and free human time for higher-order, meaningful work. The piece highlights global experiments with four-day workweeks and flexible schedules that emphasize outcomes rather than hours. It concludes that HR must redefine productivity around impact, creativity, and judgment, not time, and design work systems where humans and AI thrive together.

The Top 10 Insights from the "Science of a Meaningful Life" in 2025

Kira M. Newman, Jill Suttie, Katherine Reynolds Lewis, Elizabeth Hopper (…), Greater Good Magazine see online

The article highlights the most influential findings of 2025 related to living a meaningful life. Researchers identified several themes that contribute to a deeper sense of purpose and wellbeing. For example, studies show that cultivating hope —even when outcomes are uncertain— can strengthen one's sense of meaning, as hopeful emotions are more strongly linked to meaning than general positive affect. Similarly, acting in ways perceived as moral (e.g., being compassionate, fair, and dependable) is associated with both greater happiness and a stronger sense of purpose, suggesting that ethical behavior and wellbeing often go hand in hand. Other insights from the year point to mind-body connections, the social nature of enjoyment, the importance of forgiveness, and the role of trust in sustaining wellbeing. Collectively, these insights underscore that meaning arises from psychological, relational, ethical, and communal processes rather than from isolated individual experience.

> " People prioritize similar sources of purpose across very different cultural backgrounds, and benefit in much the same way from having a sense of purpose. "

Articles (2)

Frontier CEO Nick Jeffery: Purpose, strategy, and keeping it simple

Nick Jeffery and Eric Kutcher, McKinsey & Co see online

In a Inside the *Strategy Room* interview, Frontier Communications CEO Nick Jeffery discusses how a clear, simple purpose and strategy enabled the turnaround of the bankrupt fiber provider into a growing business poised for a major acquisition. Jeffery explains that purpose—defined as a shared sense of why the company exists and what it is trying to achieve—was central to rallying the workforce after years of underperformance. He emphasizes that purpose must be clear, actionable, and consistently communicated across all levels, rather than abstract or generic. Jeffery also describes how focusing on simplicity in strategy helped align resources and decision-making, reinforcing the importance of a strong purpose as the foundation for execution. Ultimately, he argues that purpose and strategy are enduring anchors in times of transformation.

> **"** What makes a business better? I think it starts with having a very strong and simple purpose so that people are clear on why we do what we do, where we are going, and why it matters. **"**

Now is the Time to put Public Lands at the Heart of Brand Purpose

Dieter Fenkart-Froeschl, Sustainable Brands see online

The article argues that corporate sustainability is at a turning point, and that public lands offer a powerful, tangible way for brands to ground purpose in real impact. Aligning sustainability efforts with public lands responds to these expectations—because public lands are broadly trusted by Americans and provide ecological, social, and economic benefits across communities. Rather than treating support for public lands as philanthropy, companies can integrate it into their brand purpose by focusing on measurable outcomes like acres restored, watersheds protected, and trails maintained. The article highlights Airstream's longstanding partnership with the National Forest Foundation as an example of how brand identity and stewardship can be authentically connected to land conservation.