# PURPOSE TRENDS REPORT

A selection of what has been published about Purpose in November 2025
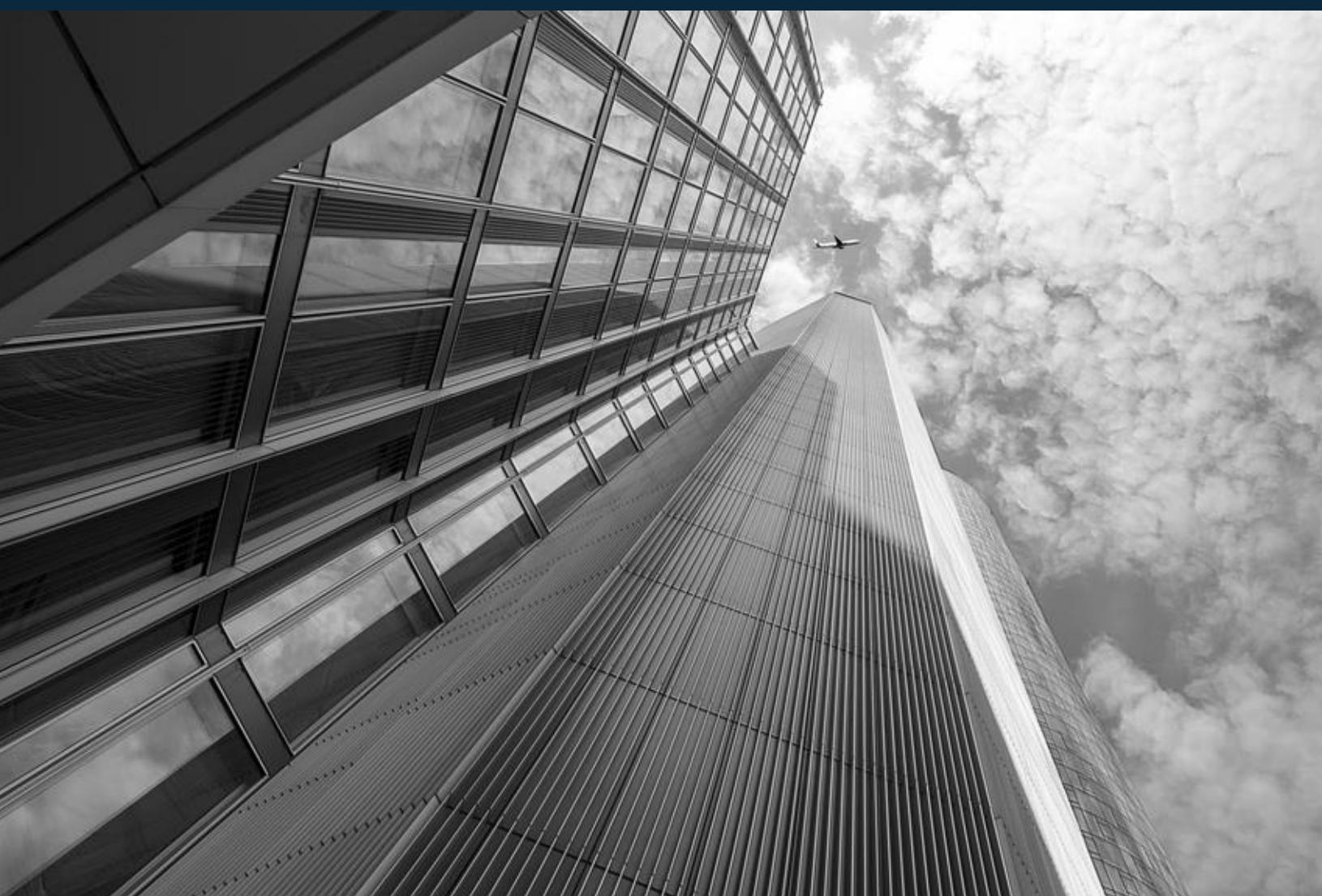
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INTRODUCTION

In this report, we want to synthesize the most relevant about corporate purpose published in November 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 - NOVEMBER 2025
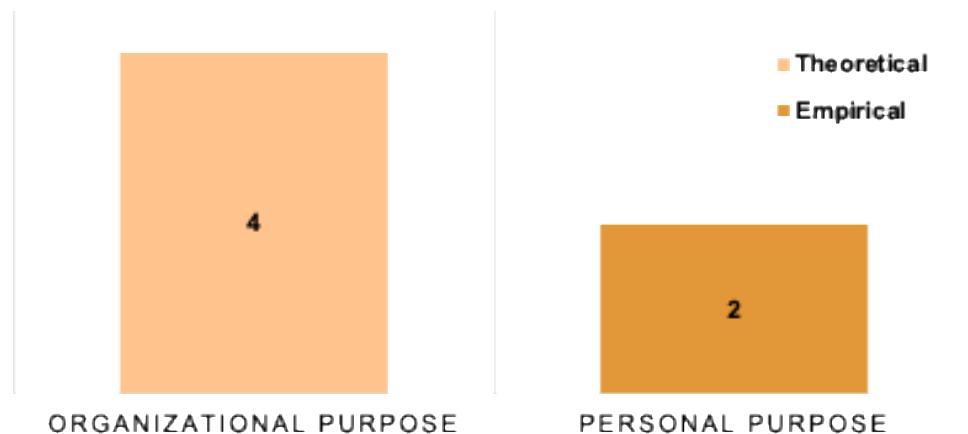
ARTICLES AND REPORTS - NOVEMBER 2025
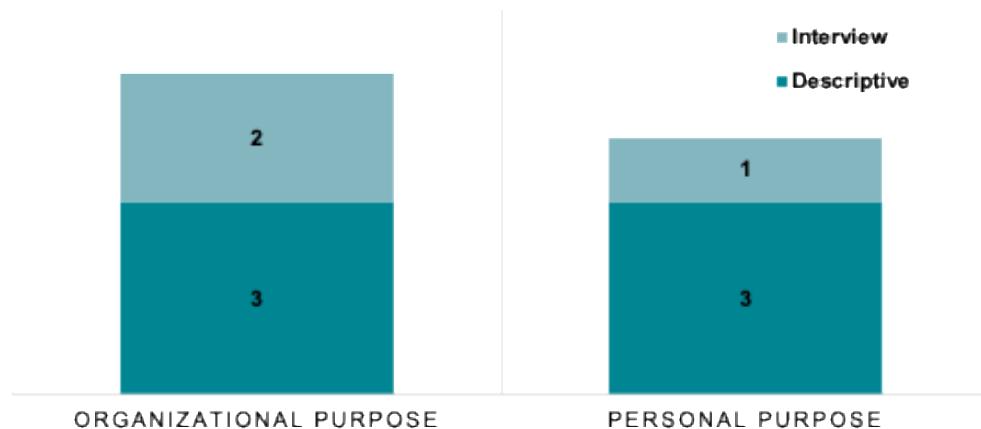
This month's publications frame organizational purpose as a shift from slogans to systems. Academic research examines how purpose becomes actionable through unit mandates, governance structures, and institutional logics that move management beyond shareholder primacy toward the public good. Systematic reviews and legal analyses highlight both the promise of socially oriented corporate purpose and the structural barriers embedded in law, language, and organizational systems. Practitioner articles reinforce these insights by stressing clarity over jargon, the financial returns of well-implemented purpose, and leadership grounded in the common good rather than ideology. Together, they portray purpose as a strategic and institutional design challenge that requires alignment, credibility, and disciplined execution to generate both societal and business value.

Research on personal purpose highlights how meaning develops through lived experience, psychological safety, and engagement with uncertainty. Academic publications show that service learning strengthens life purpose and professional identity, while psychologically safe environments support well-being, even if purpose itself cannot be imposed. Articles complement these findings by revealing a widespread purpose gap at work, rising mental and emotional strain, and a growing desire—especially among younger generations—for meaningful, values-aligned work. Together, these contributions suggest that personal purpose is not taught directly but cultivated through supportive environments, reflective practices, and work experiences that connect individual growth with contribution beyond the self.

Academic publications (4)

Delivering on the Purpose: The Formulation of Effective Unit Mandates

Academy of Management Perspectives, JCR Q1 <u>see online</u>

Abstract: Corporate leaders are encouraged to formulate clear and engaging purpose or mission statements for their organizations. But how do leaders ensure that the purpose or mission is realized? Two of the most common approaches—communication and metrics—are necessary, but not sufficient. Communication fosters awareness and understanding of the purpose or mission among employees, but it does not in itself create accountability for action. Similarly, metrics are needed to track performance, but they often fail to provide a clear link between employees' daily activities and the overall purpose or mission of the organization. We argue that leaders instead need to align the formal organization with the organization's purpose or mission by establishing unit mandates, which clarify the function, authority, and domain of different units. Further, we identify criteria for effective unit mandates and propose a systematic approach for crafting these mandates by engaging stakeholders in a deliberative process to ensure horizontal alignment across units and vertical alignment with the overall organizational purpose or mission.

> **" Metrics are needed to track performance, but they often fail to provide a clear link between employees' daily activities and the overall purpose or mission of the organization. "**

Purposeful Management and the Public Good: Relationships, Tensions, and Consequences

Journal of Management Studies, JCR Q1 <u>see online</u>

Abstract: Traditional management practices have long prioritized organizational performance and financial growth, primarily serving shareholder interests. However, escalating societal and environmental challenges - such as climate change, human rights violations, the dismantling of democratic institutions, and public health crises - raise questions about the adequacy of these priorities and call for greater attention to management's role in advancing the public good. This Special Issue examines the relationships, tensions, and consequences associated with efforts to repurpose management towards broader societal aims. We distinguish between organizational purpose - the stated aspirational goals of firms - and repurposed management, which reflects broader shifts in managerial logic, practices, and institutional expectations aimed at serving the public good. The contributing articles explore how such repurposing is constructed and enacted across institutional settings, and how managerial practices influence governance structures, stakeholder dynamics, and field-level norms to shape public outcomes - both intended and unintended. By shifting the analytical lens from purpose as internal intent to purpose as institutionally mediated consequence, we invite more inquiry into how, when, and for whom purposeful management contributes to the public good - foregrounding the institutional mechanisms, stakeholder dynamics, and societal outcomes through which purpose is interpreted, negotiated and enacted.

From Buzzword to Framework: A Systematic Review of the Massive Transformative Purpose Concept

Administrative Sciences, JCR Q2 see online

Abstract: In the current disruptive business landscape, there is a disconnect between the practical traction of digital revolution approaches and their academic rigour, exacerbated by a lack of collaboration between practitioners and academics. In this study, this issue is addressed by systematically analysing the Massive Transformative Purpose (MTP) concept for Exponential Organisations (ExOs). The significant success of the MTP among practitioners highlights an urgent need to translate this construct into management science to gain a deeper understanding. Through a systematic literature review guided by the PRISMA framework and Gioia methodology, this study synthesises available knowledge from the concept's original authors and the practitioner community. The findings reveal that the MTP is central to an ExO's brand core, profoundly influencing its internal and external dimensions and its competitive advantage. This study makes several theoretical contributions as follows: (i) refining the definition of the MTP; (ii) providing a data structure that links antecedents, dimensions, and outcomes; and (iii) offering a framework to guide both academic research and managerial practice.

Social and Legal Barriers to a Socially-Focussed Corporate Purpose: A Luhmannian Systems Analysis

European Company and Financial Law Review, JCR Q2 see online

Abstract: Corporate purpose is being reimagined away from profit and shareholder value maximisation, towards a wider, more sustainable, social corporate purpose (SCP), thereby potentially involving a wider range of stakeholders in corporate governance and creating value for wider society. However, it is argued that such a reimagination needs to take account of the embedded nature of the shareholder primacy value within both law, individual companies, and wider societal practices. Luhmann's systems theory is deployed here to identify the specific legal and extra-legal challenges that those wishing to steer corporate purpose towards SCP are likely to face. Existing socially orientated corporate governance initiatives, such as corporate social responsibility (CSR), are also critiqued with reference to systems theory. The potential for steering corporate purpose is also examined, along with indicative doctrinal solutions.

Articles (5)

The ROI of Purpose with Steve Rochlin

Carol Cone, Purpose 360 *see online*

The most prominent argument against purpose is that doing good doesn't actually pay off at the bottom line. For decades, and throughout Carol Cone's career, skeptics have dismissed purpose as a "soft" strategy that is good for reputation but not for financial returns. That misconception is what Impact ROI set out to challenge. Impact ROI's Project ROI reports have published research that links purpose to profit. And with the release of the newest edition, there is now fresh data connecting purpose to financial value. We invited Steve Rochlin, CEO of Impact ROI, to walk us through this new research and how it can be used to make the case to leaders focused on financial returns. From revealing how sustainability leaders can see up to a 36% boost in market value and a 57% reduction in employee turnover, to outlining the "Fit, Commit, Manage, and Connect" framework that defines high-performing purpose strategies, Rochlin offers a key strategies for organizations looking to align impact with performance.

Jargon Is Hurting Your Strategy

Andrea Belk Olson, HBR *see online*

Corporate strategies are often written with the best intentions. Leaders want to inspire, energize, and align. Yet too frequently, the language of strategy—full of abstractions such as "innovation," "excellence," and "agility"—becomes more fog than fuel. Instead of clarifying the path forward, the very words meant to unify teams sow misinterpretation, confusion, and drift.

Leading through a polarized world

John Almandoz, IESE Insight *see online*

The article argues that in an increasingly polarized world, leaders face growing pressure to take sides on social and political issues, which can undermine trust and cohesion within organizations. It proposes purpose-driven leadership as a stabilizing force, where purpose is understood as a genuine commitment to serve others and contribute to the common good. By anchoring decisions in purpose rather than ideology, leaders can navigate polarization without opportunism. The article emphasizes the importance of caring for people, engaging constructively with diverse viewpoints, and maintaining a holistic vision of the organization's role in society.

> " Purpose is not about taking sides in polarized debates, but about anchoring leadership decisions in a genuine commitment to the common good. "

General Catalyst CEO Hemant Taneja on Aligning Profit With Purpose

Harry Booth, Time see online

In the interview, Hemant Taneja explains that traditional "profit-only" capitalism is outdated and must evolve into inclusive capitalism where business success is aligned with positive social impact, especially amid rapid AI growth and societal inequality. He argues that leaders should embed purpose and values into their strategies, thinking long-term rather than focusing solely on short-term gains, and that AI can drive widespread prosperity if deployed responsibly across sectors like healthcare. Taneja also emphasizes the need for responsible innovation, self-regulation paired with sensible oversight, and maintaining values under commercial pressures to build enduring companies that benefit both business and society.

The Case for Quiet Corporate Activism

Julia Binder and Heather Cairns-Lee, MIT Sloan Management Review see online

The article argues that in today's volatile political and social climate, traditional visible corporate activism on issues like sustainability, DEI, or social justice can attract backlash and risk for companies. Instead, leaders are adopting quiet corporate activism—a strategic, behind-the-scenes approach that sustains social commitments while minimizing public exposure. This involves choosing battles carefully, reframing communication, building internal and external support, and embedding values so deeply into everyday business practices that purpose becomes part of the organization's DNA. Quiet activism allows companies to advance meaningful change discreetly and effectively, even when the spotlight feels risky.

Academic publications (2)

How do Chinese volunteer and non-volunteer student teachers differ in their life purpose?

Journal of Moral Education, JCR Q1 _see online_

Abstract: Our era calls for purposeful teachers to reimagine a sustainable and just society. This study investigated the influence of volunteer teaching, a form of service learning, on teachers' purpose development in the context of teacher education in China. The life purpose of volunteer student teachers was examined and compared with that of their non-volunteer peers using the Meaning in Life Questionnaire (N = 601) and two open-ended questions (N = 524). Student teachers also reported how their purpose was connected to their teaching career. The findings revealed that volunteer teachers exhibited a higher sense of purpose, and the nature of this purpose differed from that of non-volunteers. Volunteer teachers were more capable of incorporating their professional purpose into their personal purpose. This study suggests that service learning has the potential to strengthen student teachers' life purpose and identity as moral teachers with a beyond-the-self orientation in teaching.

Do Employees Feel Psychologically Safe? Assessing its Linkage with Psychological Well-Being

Employee Responsibilities and Rights Journal, JCR Q2 _see online_

Abstract: Ensuring the psychological well-being of educators and fostering an environment that promotes empathy and compassion are critical for successfully navigating the dynamic educational environment of this modern era. This study aims to bridge the existing literature gap by examining the impact of psychological safety (PS) on the dimensions of psychological well-being, as there has been a dearth of studies on how psychological safety specifically affects the different dimensions of psychological well-being. The study incorporates Job Demands Resources (JDR) theory, Self-Determination Theory (SDT), and Conservation Resource Theory to examine how psychological safety affects academics' environment mastery, positive relationships with others, autonomy, personal growth, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. Responses were collected from 175 academicians based in Mumbai and Pune. Results confirmed the positive influence of psychological safety on autonomy, personal growth, environment mastery, positive relations with others, and self-acceptance; however, it did not affirm the effect of psychological safety on purpose in life. The impact of age as a moderating factor was not supported. By investigating the relationship between these constructs, we aim to uncover valuable insights emphasizing the need for organizations to prioritize initiatives aimed at fostering psychological safety among employees for employee welfare and organizational effectiveness. The study also offers directions for future research by encouraging longitudinal, comparative, and cross-sectoral investigations to deepen understanding and broaden the applicability of these findings.

> " People who experience enhanced psychological well-being often have a strong sense of purpose in life, embrace self-development, and have confidence in their ability to make a difference. "

PwC's Global Workforce Hopes and Fears Survey 2025

PWC see online

PwC's Global Workforce Hopes and Fears Survey 2025, based on responses from nearly 50,000 workers in 48 countries, shows that employees are optimistic about AI's potential to boost productivity and growth, even though daily usage remains relatively low, and many feel overwhelmed by rapid workplace change. Workers value trust in leadership, clarity about change, skills development, and meaningful work, but widespread financial strain and uncertainty about job security persist. The findings suggest leaders who build trust, support upskilling, and communicate purpose can better motivate employees and help organisations thrive amid technological disruption.

Can You Learn to Love the Questions of Your Life?

Jeremy Adam Smith and Elizabeth Weingarten, Greater Good Magazine see online

The article explores the idea that personal growth and meaning come not from rushing to find answers, but from learning to live well with uncertainty. Drawing on psychology and the famous insight of Rainer Maria Rilke, it argues that embracing open questions fosters resilience, curiosity, and deeper self-understanding. Rather than viewing ambiguity as a problem to solve, the article suggests that treating questions as companions can lead to wiser decisions, emotional maturity, and a more purposeful life over time.

> " How do I live a life of meaning and purpose? "

Purposeful Work Boosts Engagement, but Few Experience It

Andy Kemp, Gallup see online

The article reports that employees who strongly connect their work to a sense of purpose show significantly higher engagement, well-being, and resilience at work. However, Gallup finds that only a minority of workers feel their jobs are truly meaningful, revealing a substantial purpose gap in today's workplaces. The article emphasizes that purpose is shaped less by mission statements and more by daily experiences such as feeling valued, seeing the impact of one's work, and having supportive leaders. Leaders who intentionally connect roles to purpose can unlock higher performance and retention.

The Deeper Meaning of Authentic Happiness

Alex Pattakos, Psychology Today see online

The article argues that authentic happiness goes beyond pleasure or momentary satisfaction and is rooted in meaning, values, and contribution to something larger than oneself. Drawing on positive psychology, it explains that lasting well-being emerges when people align their actions with their character strengths and sense of purpose. Rather than avoiding discomfort, authentic happiness often involves effort, responsibility, and growth. The article reframes happiness as a byproduct of meaningful engagement with life rather than a goal pursued for its own sake.