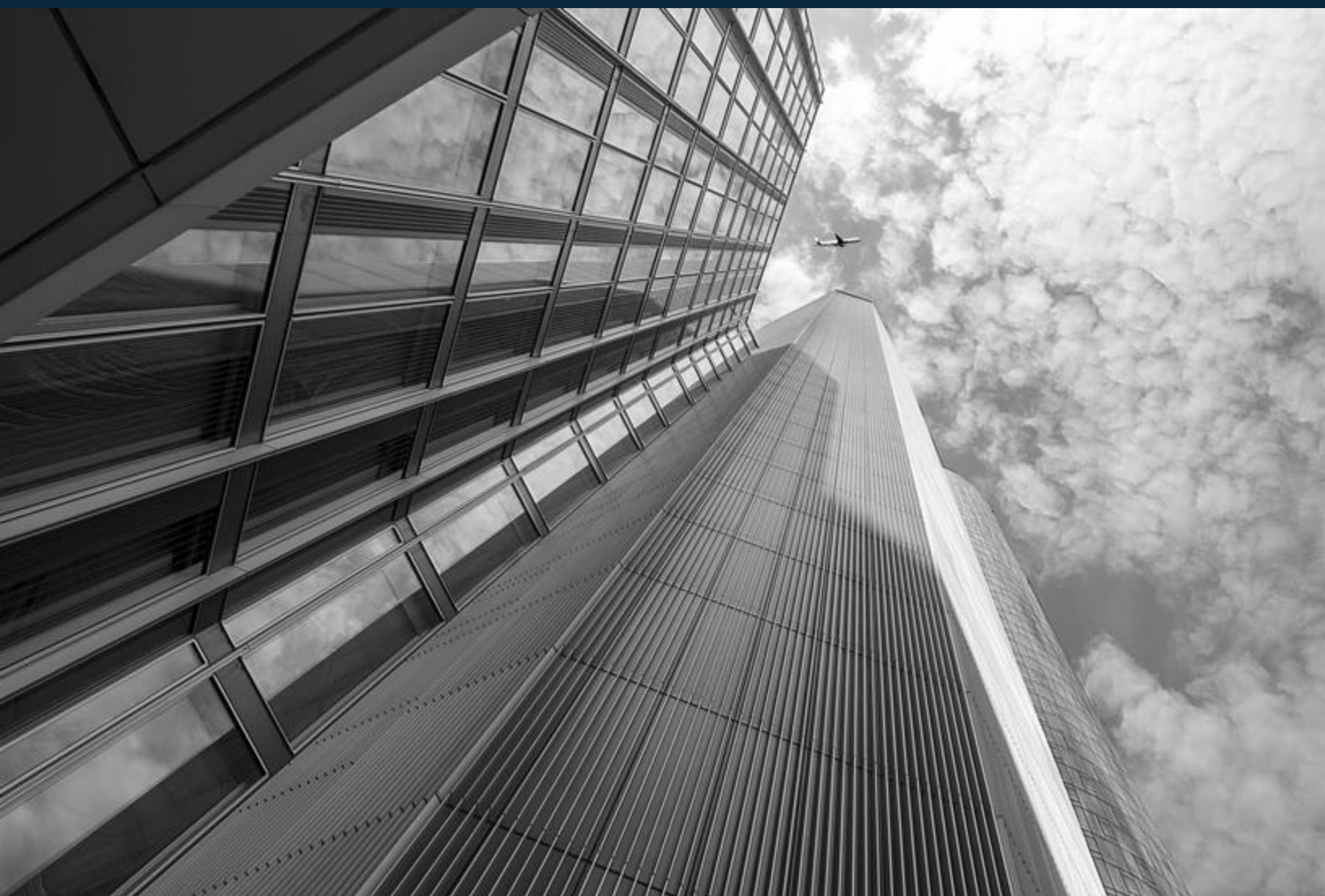


PURPOSE TRENDS REPORT

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



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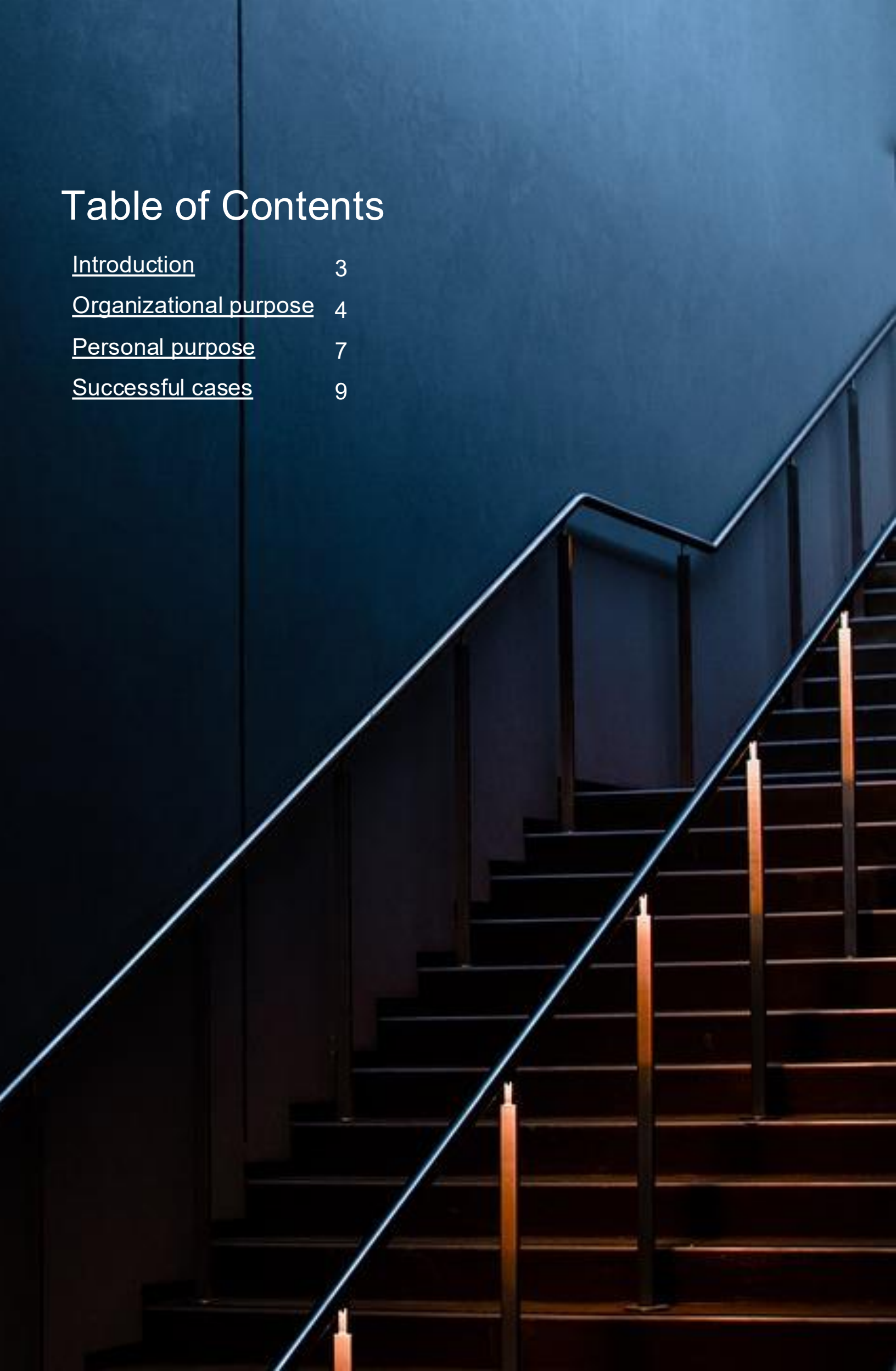
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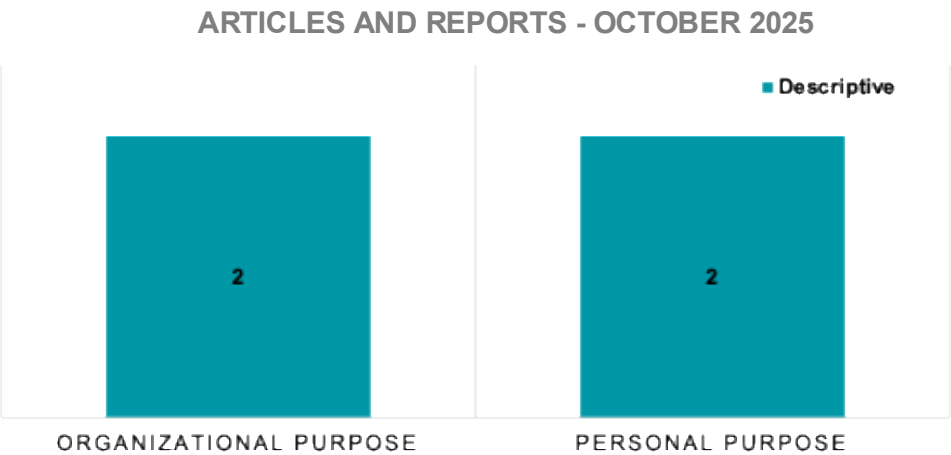
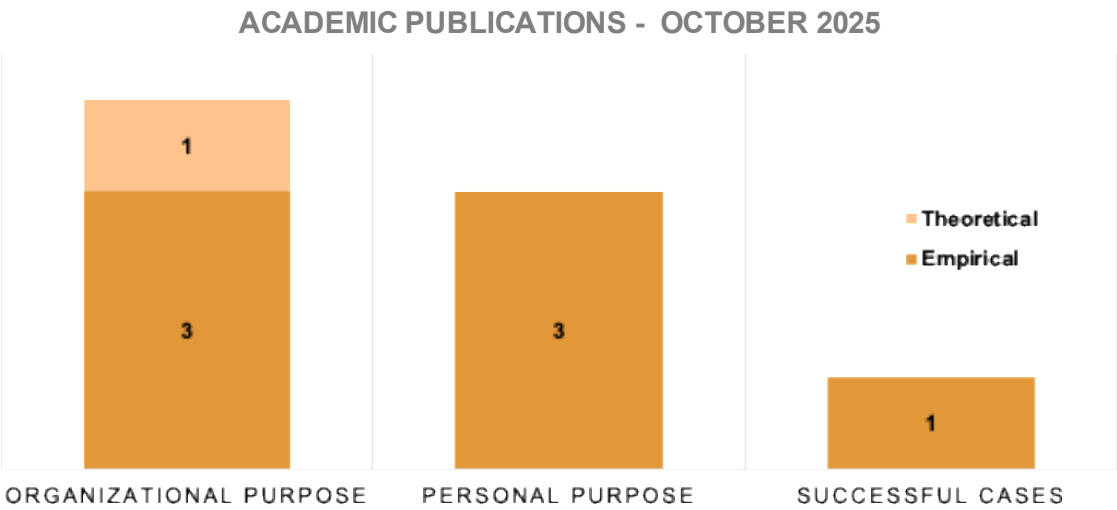
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INTRODUCTION

In this report, we want to synthesize the most relevant about corporate purpose published in October 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.



This month’s insights show that purpose is effective only when embedded in how organizations actually work. Academic research explains how shared mission drives trust and prosocial behaviour, when common purpose across managers creates performance advantage, and how directors’ values shape stakeholder versus shareholder priorities. Practitioner articles echo this: ethical leadership becomes a compass in uncertainty, while Cracker Barrel’s failed rebrand shows how change without authentic purpose backfires. Together, they highlight that purpose must be lived, not claimed.

Publications on personal purpose shows that meaningful work emerges when values, fairness and identity align. Studies reveal how mission implementation supports psychological outcomes, how employees balance purpose and compensation, and how calling relates to CSR and leadership. Articles on Gen Z and mental health add a human dimension: younger workers want flexibility, learning and purpose, yet face increased anxiety. Across both sources, personal purpose appears as a core factor in motivation, well-being and retention—not a “nice to have.”

Finally, the succesful case shows purpose in action: four Italian firms use shared purpose to drive systemic innovation and societal impact. Purpose builds trust, alignment and creativity, enabling collaboration across value chains. Leaders describe purpose as leaving the planet better, fostering open dialogue and strengthening relationships. It’s a practical demonstration of how a truly implemented purpose produces both social and competitive advantage—not rhetoric, but operational reality..

Academic publications (4)

Common purpose advantage: Reviving a managerial theory of the firm?

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.

“ A firm’s purpose exists as a single entity with two materializations: the superordinate and the pragmatic. ”

Shareholderism Around the World: Corporate Purpose, Culture, and Law

Management Science, JCR Q1 [see online](#)

Abstract: We provide the first comprehensive analysis of directors' shareholderism: their principled stance toward shareholders and stakeholders in forming strategy. We develop an analytical framework that links shareholderism to individual and institutional factors and test our theoretical predictions using a sample of more than 900 directors originating from 55 countries and serving in 23 countries. Directors' shareholderism varies according to their individual values; their cultural heritage of egalitarianism, harmony, and embeddedness; and their status as expatriate directors. Directors' shareholderism does not appear to depend on the distinction between common and civil law. Instrumental variable regressions that address the endogeneity of directors' expatriate status suggest that expatriates' and local directors' shareholderism reflect different cultural emphases. To be effective, current approaches to ensuring corporations do the "right" thing through legal injunctions may need to be mindful of the stability and resilience of individual values and culture.

The Authenticity of Purpose Claims: Firm Capacity and Job Seeker Responses to Recruitment Efforts

Management Science, JCR Q1 [see online](#)

Abstract: Whereas corporate purpose involves a claim made to galvanize stakeholders, recent research on the topic has not examined it as a claim. Given the information asymmetry that many evaluators of purpose claims face, a key question concerns the conditions under which they are not simply viewed as cheap talk but are instead perceived as authentic. We argue that the difficulty and future orientation inherent to purpose claims make firm capacity a key source of authenticity and, ultimately, positive evaluations. We examine these ideas in the labor market context, where employers often present purpose claims to job seekers facing information asymmetry. First, we develop and validate a novel measure of purpose claim strength using a combination of topic modeling, dictionary-based validation, and experimental validation. Using this measure, we test our capacity hypothesis with job application field data, using firm size as a proxy for capacity. We find that high-purpose job posts receive approximately 50% more applications than low-purpose job posts when the firm has more than 1,000 employees, but only receive about a 10% increase when the firm has fewer than 50 employees. In a second study, we use vignette experiments to directly test our hypothesized mechanism. We show that, conditional on a strong purpose claim, size manipulations shape capacity perceptions, leading to greater perceived authenticity and increased application likelihood. Next, holding size constant, we show that an affiliation-based manipulation leads to similar results. Our paper helps scholars understand what gives authenticity to purpose claims and helps practitioners understand how they can more effectively communicate purpose.

Purpose in Practice: Mission Implementation and Employees' Psychosocial Outcomes Across Organizational Contexts

Studies in Big Data [see online](#)

Abstract: Amid shifting organizational landscapes, mission has gained prominence as a strategic mechanism for promoting alignment and shared purpose. Yet, declaration of mission alone rarely leads to meaningful impact unless it is understood, internalized, and enacted in employees' daily work. This paper examines how effective mission implementation, defined as the consistency between mission content, practice, and motivation, relates to employee outcomes, including organizational commitment, prosocial behavior, and meaningful work. Study 1 draws on data from employees in organizations participating in the Driving Purpose and Mission Collaborative (DPMC), which actively engage in purpose-driven management practices. Study 2 includes employees from a broader range of organizations without formalized mission structures. Structural equation modeling was used in both studies. In Study 1, effective mission implementation directly predicted prosocial behavior and indirectly predicted meaningful work, mediated by organizational trust. In Study 2, mission implementation influenced outcomes only indirectly, with trust playing a central mediating role. These findings underscore the significance of mission implementation as a dynamic, context-sensitive process and demonstrate how alignment, trust, and prosocial motivation shape employees' experience of purpose at work.

“ Organizations more deliberately structured around mission appear to reflect a more humanistic organizational logic, where purpose is embedded in employees' everyday experiences.

”

Courageous leadership in an age of uncertainty: Why business ethics matters more than ever

Carol Cone, Purpose 360 [see online](#)

In a world marked by political polarization, AI disruption, climate crisis and economic instability, business leaders face ethical minefields. The article argues that ethical leadership combined with a clear purpose is essential to navigate uncertainty and build trust. When a firm’s values and purpose align, leaders can guide decisions even in gray-area situations — for example, tough supplier issues or moral dilemmas — while preserving integrity and social responsibility. Ethical companies tend to outperform competitors and earn greater long-term trust. The authors conclude that purpose + ethics isn’t optional: it’s a core leadership compass for sustainable businesses.

Cracker Barrel: Change without purpose isn't progress

Carol Cone, Purpose 360 [see online](#)

Cracker Barrel attempted in 2025 to modernize by replacing its iconic “Old Timer” logo with a simpler, minimalist design. The change provoked intense backlash from customers, social-media users and cultural commentators, because many felt the redesign erased the brand’s nostalgic identity. Under pressure, the company reversed the decision within days, reinstating the original logo and acknowledging that they had “failed to communicate who they are.” The article shows that rebranding without a clear, emotionally resonant purpose can backfire — change without purpose is not perceived as progress.

“ Purpose could offer a legitimate path forward — if implemented strategically. ”



Academic publications (3)

Work meaning and fair wages

Labour Economics, JCR Q1 [see online](#)

Abstract: Work meaning can be an important driver of labor supply. Since, by definition, work meaning is associated with benefits for others, it also has an important fairness dimension. In a theoretical model, we show that workers' willingness to pay for work meaning can be positive or negative, depending on the relative strength of fairness concerns and meaning preferences. To examine the importance of these behavioral motives for labor supply, we conduct a survey experiment with representative samples from The Netherlands and Germany in which we vary within-subject the benefits that a job creates for others. We find that only a minority of workers are actually willing to sacrifice wage for work meaning. The average willingness to pay for work meaning is positive, but substantially lower than the willingness to pay for job flexibility. There is a strong negative relationship between fairness concerns and willingness to pay for work meaning. Thus, individuals who prioritize fairness are less likely to accept lower wages for meaningful work.

Role of Ethical Leadership in Creating Meaningful Work Through Corporate Social Responsibility in Bhutan: A Conditional Mediation Model

Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management, JCR Q1 [see online](#)

Abstract: This research investigated how ethical leaders drive employees to experience meaningfulness at work by influencing employees' perception of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). It also examined if employees' skepticism towards CSR moderates these relationships. Conducted in Bhutan, where CSR is legally required but emerging, the study surveyed 797 employees from 15 companies using partial least squares path modeling. Findings confirmed that the perceived CSR mediates the positive link between ethical leadership and meaningfulness at work. Meanwhile, employees' skepticism towards CSR weakens both the positive impact of CSR perception on meaningfulness at work as well as the mediated path. The study highlights CSR as a potential source of meaningfulness at work, reflecting the core values and genuine concern of the company for the betterment of society. The research provides theoretical insights for researchers and practitioners to improve CSR practices to create meaningful work while highlighting the importance of managing employees' skepticism towards CSR. It also broadens the understanding of CSR manifestation in a context beyond developed countries.

Meaningful work and corporate social responsibility: Examining the interactions of a sense of calling with organizational- and job-level factors

Journal of Occupational and Org Psychology, JCR Q2 [see online](#)

Abstract: Drawing on a multilevel framework of factors fostering meaningful work and the extant Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) literature, we examine the interactions of a sense of calling (an individual-level variable) with contextual factors at the organizational level (i.e. CSR) and job level (i.e. job autonomy and CSR embedded in work). In Study 1, we propose and test a multilevel model on 758 employees in 18 organizations, finding that a sense of calling, interacting with organizational CSR and job autonomy, is positively related to meaningful work. In Study 2, we conduct a scenario-based experiment with 261 participants, finding that the three-way interaction between a sense of calling, CSR at the organizational level and CSR in work is positively related to meaningful work. These results provide important theoretical and practical implications for further studying the interactions of individual-, job- and organizational-level sources of meaningful work and, specifically, unpacking the role of CSR.

Articles (2)

World Mental Health Day 2025: Gen Zs and millennials on mental well-being at work

Emma Codd, Deloitte [see online](#)

The Deloitte piece tied to World Mental Health Day highlights that mental health remains a global priority — especially in workplaces where stress, anxiety, and overwork have surged. The article notes worrying levels of distress among younger generations: many report that their job contributes significantly to their anxiety, with long hours, lack of recognition or reward, and toxic cultures being major stressors. It emphasizes that while some employers offer support programmes, uptake is low, and structural factors — leadership behaviour, job design, organizational practices — determine mental-well-being outcomes more than perks alone. Deloitte argues companies must treat mental health as a strategic priority, embedding support and systemic change rather than relying on ad-hoc initiatives.

How to turn Gen Z into management material

Laura Whitcombe, Financial Times [see online](#)

The article argues that as the generation born between 1995 and 2010 enters the workforce, organisations must rethink how to prepare them for managerial roles. Unlike previous generations, Gen Z prioritizes purpose, flexibility, and values-driven work — but they also face unique challenges: AI disruption, uncertainty, rapid change. To harness Gen Z's potential, companies should create environments that foster learning, adaptability, psychological safety and meaning. Traditional hierarchies and rigid paths risk disengaging these younger workers. Instead, firms should focus on coaching, autonomy, continuous skill development and aligning work with values. In doing so, they can transform Gen Z talent into capable, motivated leaders ready for future challenges.

Academic publications (1)

Corporate purpose and systemic innovation: intra-organisational dynamics to address societal challenges

Technology Analysis & Strategic Management, JCR Q2 [see online](#)

Abstract: Recent literature increasingly suggests that embracing corporate purpose provides companies with a competitive edge in driving systemic innovations, which are crucial for addressing complex societal challenges in our interconnected world. However, there is a dearth of empirical research exploring the organisational mechanisms through which corporate purpose facilitates systemic innovation. Our study seeks to address this gap by qualitatively analysing internal documents, reports, and interviews with managers and founders of four Italian purpose-driven companies. Our findings reveal three key intra-organisational dynamics enabled by corporate purpose: (1) strategic vision and alignment, (2) engagement, motivation, and creativity, and (3) trust and relational contracts – all of which facilitate the implementation of systemic innovation. This research contributes to both the grand challenges and organisational theory literature by offering a deeper understanding of how corporate purpose can be effectively leveraged to drive positive change. Additionally, it serves to stimulate new avenues of inquiry for management scholars and offers practical insights for companies striving to address the contemporary challenges of our society.

“ Our purpose is to leave the planet in a better state than we found it. Our enduring commitment to this purpose shapes our identity and yields dividends over time. ”

“ Here, there is a lot of collaboration among us... there’s a virtuous system where all of us receive much more from the relationships than what we give. ”

“ Addressing a social need through systemic innovation that builds robust value chain is key to maintain competitiveness. ”

“ Being united by the same purpose allows us to encourage collaborators to express opinions, fostering a trust environment and mutual confrontation. ”

