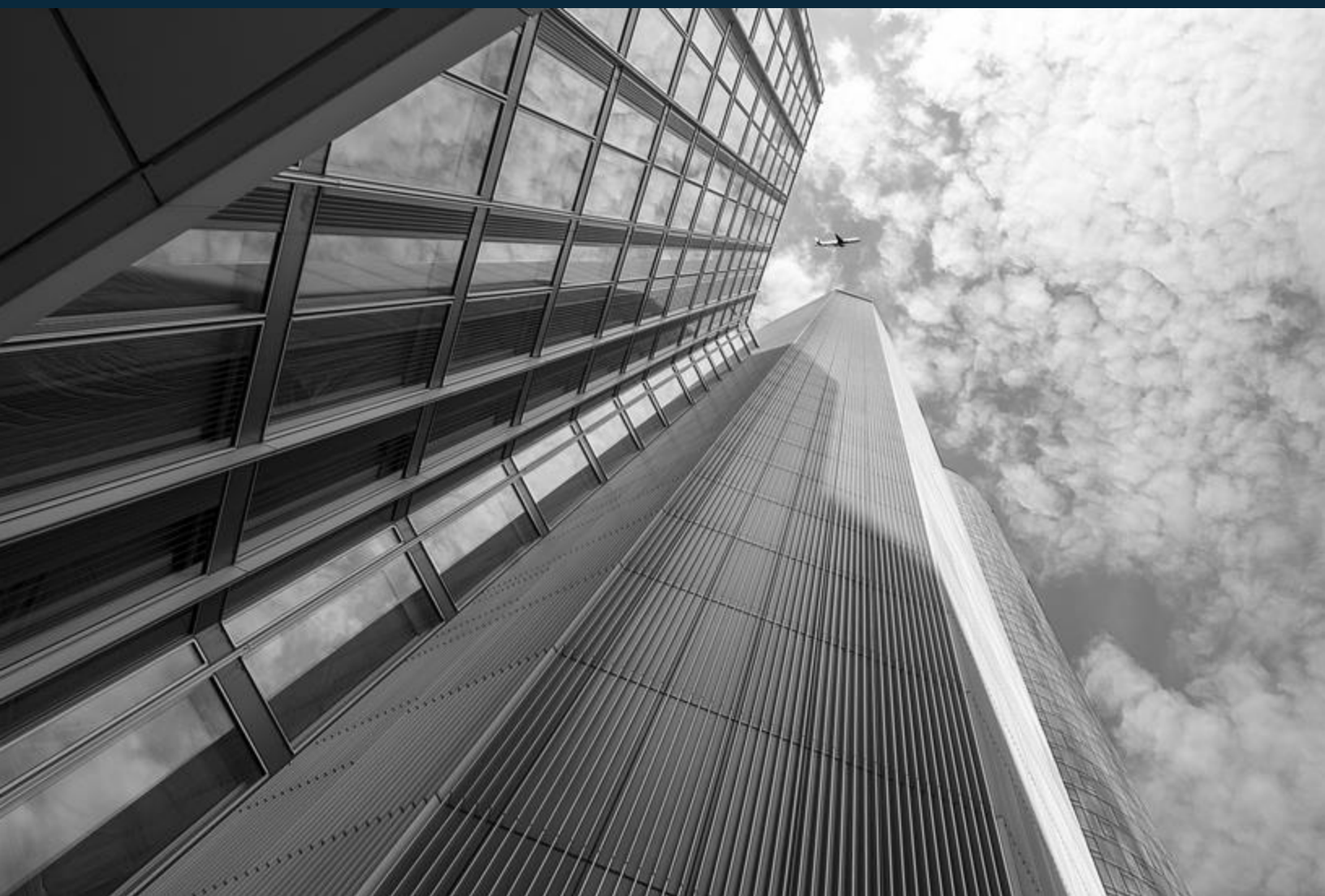


PURPOSE TRENDS REPORT

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



September 2025

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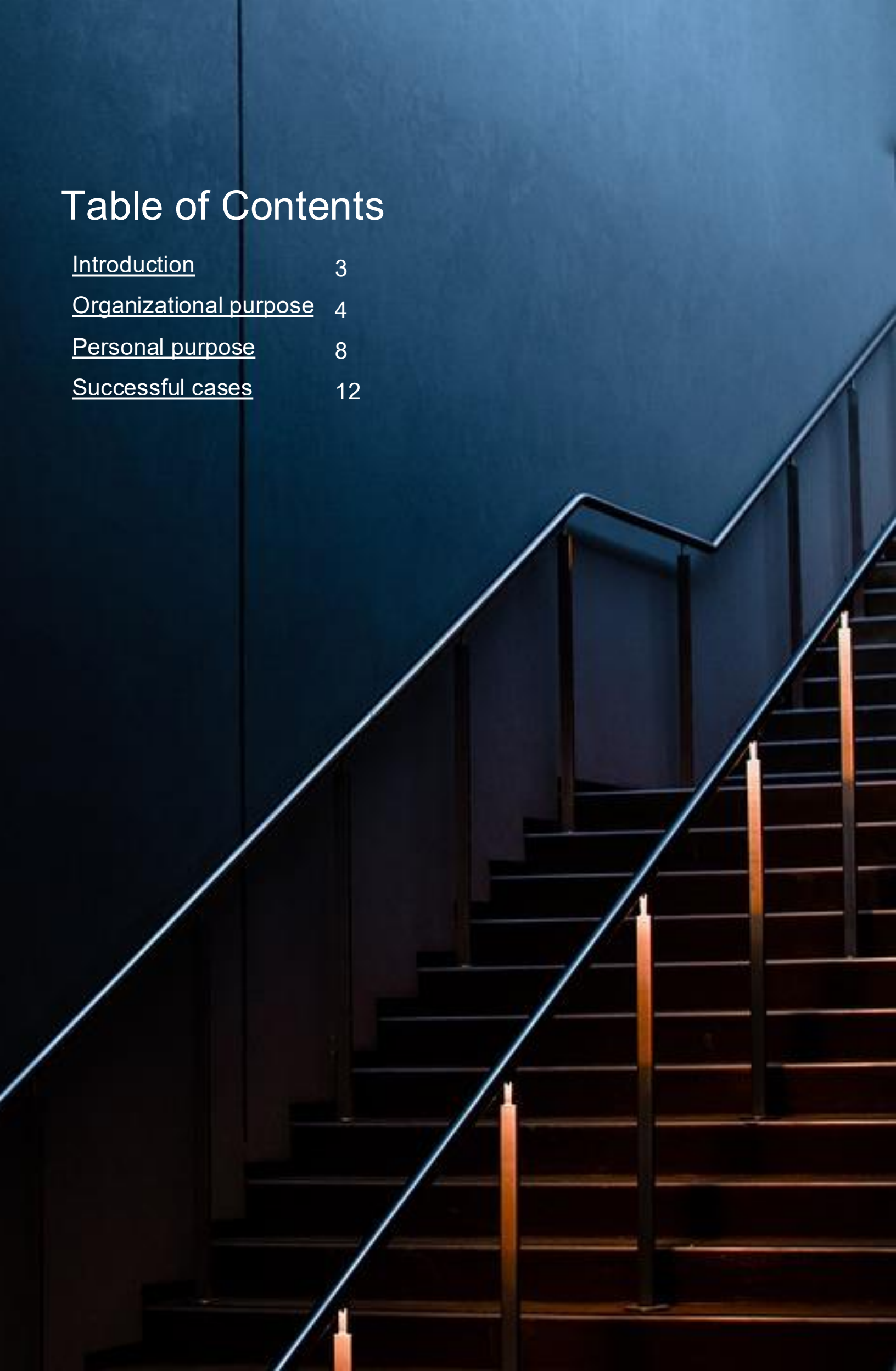
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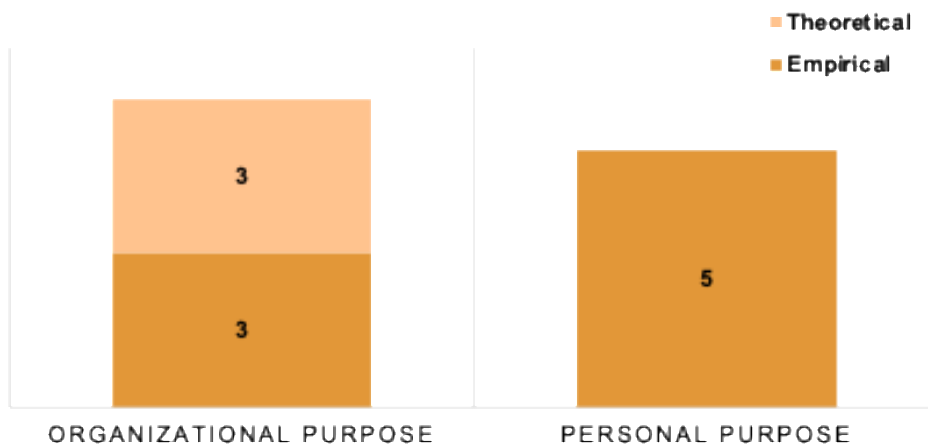
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INTRODUCTION

In this report, we want to synthesize the most relevant about corporate purpose published in September 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 - SEPTEMBER 2025



ARTICLES AND REPORTS - SEPTEMBER 2025



Research this month shows that organizational purpose is increasingly viewed as a strategic and governance challenge. Academic studies reveal tensions created by shareholder heterogeneity, governance trade-offs, and the risk of symbolic actions when purpose is poorly embedded. At the same time, practitioner articles emphasize that geopolitical pressures demand a clearly defined purpose as a stabilizing compass. Together, they show that purpose must be both well-governed and culturally embedded to guide decisions and build resilience.

Publications on personal purpose highlight its growing importance for well-being and sustainable performance. Empirical research demonstrates that meaningful work strengthens autonomy, engagement, and identity, while reducing stress and turnover intentions. Practitioner articles complement this by showing that harmonizing personal goals and clarifying core values helps individuals navigate complexity with coherence. Overall, personal purpose emerges as a key driver of motivation, alignment, and psychological health.

Finally, successful cases featured this month illustrate how purpose becomes real when organizations turn values into action. Across industries, companies use purpose to guide decisions, redesign systems, and strengthen social and environmental impact. These examples show that purpose-driven strategies not only inspire employees but also generate innovation and long-term value, demonstrating the practical power of purpose when fully implemented.

Academic publications (6)

Corporate Purpose and Democratic Theory: A Governance Trilemma

Journal of Business Ethics, JCR Q1 [see online](#)

Abstract: Over the last years, both in the popular press, policy and business circles and in academia, people call for corporations to orient their behavior towards ‘purpose’. This is meant as a move away from shareholder value maximization as the lodestar for corporate action. But purpose-advocates are torn between two directions in thinking about corporate governance: towards corporate governance on behalf of stakeholders by an independent board, and towards corporate governance by stakeholders through a responsive board. The paper’s aim is to enlighten this choice by placing it in a trilemma with a third option: corporate governance on behalf of shareholders. This corporate governance trilemma shows us which trade-offs are at stake in making choices between the relevant values: the minimization of externalities, collective decision-making costs and agency costs. It discusses the various trade-offs in the trilemma. Finally, the paper argues that corporate purpose is best served by a balance between board independence and responsiveness.

Symbolic or substantive? How shareholder heterogeneity shapes the purpose of the corporation

Long Range Planning, JCR Q1 [see online](#)

Abstract: This study investigates how the heterogeneity of shareholders’ financial and social interests creates tension around competing interpretations of the purpose of the corporation, particularly regarding their incompatibility and relative prevalence of initiatives that extend beyond profit maximization. These tensions are especially salient when shareholder activists—who possess both legal rights and economic influence—exert divergent pressures to achieve both financial and social goals, which then shapes how firms respond to such pressures. Based on a sample of 5302 shareholder-initiated proposals submitted to S&P 1500 firms, we find that when the variety of shareholders targeting a firm blends conflicting perspectives about pursuing profit and social goals to a greater extent, firms are more likely to respond with symbolic actions, for a consequential misalignment between advocated CSR policies and implemented practices. We also provide evidence that this association is weaker in the presence of activism and ownership by shareholders who publicly self-identify as socially oriented investors, suggesting that these investors influence both the credibility and the centrality of the social logic in managerial decision-making. Our results advance understanding of how firms navigate the complexities of achieving a purpose of the corporation beyond profit maximization, amid the evolving landscape of divergent shareholder interests and activism.

“ The heterogeneity of shareholders’ financial and social interests creates tension around competing interpretations of the purpose of the corporation.

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Purpose and profit: Understanding consumer reactions to social enterprises in retail and services

Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services, JCR Q1 [see online](#)

Abstract: Social enterprises have gained increasing attention in retail and consumer services due to their dual commitment to social impact (purpose) and financial sustainability (profit). Like any business venture, social enterprises need consumers in order to exist and survive. However, research on how consumers perceive and respond to social enterprises remains scarce. This article presents three experimental studies from retail and service-oriented contexts, which demonstrate that consumers exhibit more favorable behavioral intentions towards social enterprises as compared to for-profit organizations and for-profit companies with corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives. This effect was most pronounced among consumers with strong ethical values and motives. The findings showed that consumers perceive social enterprises as warmer, more moral, and – importantly – equally competent as for-profit companies, which enhances their affective responses and, ultimately, their behavioral intentions. These insights contribute to the literature on consumer reactions to alternative business models and offer managerial implications for retail and consumer services.

Polarization, purpose and profit

Journal of Financial Economics, JCR Q1 [see online](#)

Abstract: We present a model in which firms compete for workers who value nonpecuniary job attributes, such as purpose, sustainability, political stances, or working conditions. Firms adopt production technologies that enable them to offer jobs with varying levels of these desirable attributes. Firms' profits are higher when they cater to workers with extreme preferences. In a competitive assignment equilibrium, firms become polarized and not only reflect but also amplify the polarized preferences of the general population. More polarized sectors exhibit higher profits, lower average wages, and a reduced labor share of value added. Sustainable investing amplifies firm polarization.



The Power of Purpose: How Organizational Purpose Strength Enhances Social Well-Being Within Work Teams

Business Strategy and Development, JCR Q2 [see online](#)

Abstract: The Covid-19 pandemic has made explicit both the rise in loneliness and mental illness and the increase in remote work or working from home; a working condition shown to be related to loneliness, anxiety, and depression. This paper explores whether a strong organizational purpose, at the group level—defined as employees within a group understanding, valuing, and contributing to it—can generate bonds that promote social well-being at the group level in a dynamic and changing world. Using Partial Least Squares and a sample of 261 departments/groups of 31 organizations, we found that group-level organizational purpose strength fosters social well-being within work groups, as reflected in group-level sense of belonging and collaborative behaviors. We also identify group-level characteristics that may moderate these relationships. Our findings advance Social Identity Theory, Self-Determination Theory, and the emerging Theory of Purpose Orientation by extending prior research on organizational purpose. Earlier research has examined purpose mainly in relation to final outcomes like productivity and performance but has overlooked intermediate outcomes such as group-level social well-being—the focus of this study.

“ Purpose is genuinely implemented when it is clearly understood by employees, internalized, and reflected in their day-to-day behaviors.

”

Bridging the understanding of corporate purpose with its effectiveness: A systematic literature review and research directions

Journal of Management and Organization, JCR Q2 [see online](#)

Abstract: The growing body of literature on corporate purpose has underscored its potential as a strategic driver for firms. However, its practical implementation remains challenging due to the concept's multifaceted and often abstract nature. By reviewing 118 articles, this systematic literature review develops a process framework on how corporate purpose can be translated into concrete organizational strategies across three dimensions: antecedents, management, and consequences. Specifically, we identify the foundational conditions that shape a purpose statement in firms, examine how purpose is embedded and shared within them, and assess the multilevel outcomes of an effective purpose. The review highlights actionable levers to align purpose with strategy and practice, discussing how firms can implement their 'reason why'. In doing so, the study provides contributions to better understand corporate purpose from both a theoretical and managerial perspective, within the broader field of strategic management.

Articles (2)

Leading with purpose when stakeholder management gets geopolitical

IESE Insight [see online](#)

In an era where geopolitical tensions dominate business environments, firms find that governments and regulators often become their most demanding stakeholders. The article argues that traditional stakeholder-management models — which include employees, customers, communities and the environment — are being challenged as political interests and national imperatives rise in prominence. In such contexts, having a clearly defined corporate purpose acts as a navigational "true north": it enables organisations to decide what they will and won't do, and to align internal culture and external action accordingly. The authors propose that purpose be developed "inside-out" (define, internalize, and act) so companies can manage conflicting stakeholder demands with authenticity and resilience.

Strategic Alignment Reconciles Purpose and Profitability

Jonathan Trevor, MIT Sloan
Management Review [see online](#)

The long-running debate about whether a company's purpose should be a values-based goal or simply the goal of turning a profit presents a false choice. Strategic alignment requires both: Chasing profit alone won't yield a sustainable enterprise, and a noble purpose that is out of step with market realities is destined to fail. Successful long-term strategies align both purpose and profit.

“ While profit is an important measure of a company executing its purpose well, it can never be the purpose itself. ”



Academic publications (5)

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.

A global exploration of workplace well-being in public relations

Public Relations Review, JCR Q1 [see online](#)

Abstract: We explored aspects of workplace well-being from a global Delphi study conducted amongst nearly 300 public relations participants (practitioners, educators and academics) across 24 countries, examining nearly 1500 qualitative responses. Although the study's panelists were not specifically asked about well-being, they frequently articulated unprompted expressions of purpose, ethical tensions, and professional identity. Using a deductive coding framework we analyzed sentiments, triggers, and some interpersonal and intrapersonal measures of eudaimonic well-being across the dataset. Statistical analysis revealed that positive sentiment was most strongly predicted by a sense of success at work and ethical autonomy, while negative sentiment was closely associated with disconnection from management and misalignment between personal values and professional roles. These findings lead us to propose 'profession-practice alignment' as a core condition for sustainable, workplace well-being, with implications for leadership, culture, and retention in PR. Furthermore we link such 'professional-practice alignment' to a sense of communitarian purpose in eudaimonic work-place wellbeing. The study contributes to a reframing of well-being in PR, rooted in profession-practice alignment, ethical resilience, and the social dynamics of work, highlighting the need for the profession to apply its own relational expertise inward, to support the emotional and ethical conditions of its practitioners.

Employability as antecedent of eudaimonic wellbeing at work: The mediating role of work meaningfulness

Journal of Vocational Behavior, JCR Q1 [see online](#)

Abstract: Employee eudaimonic wellbeing is crucial for sustainable performance, health, and quality of work life. However, research is needed to understand what shapes eudaimonic wellbeing at work (EWW), and how and why. Drawing on the self-discovery framework of eudaimonic identity, this study investigated whether employability dimensions (career identity, personal adaptability, and social and human capital) are related to two dimensions of EWW (personal growth at work and purpose in career). Moreover, based on the worker-centric approach to work meaningfulness, we tested whether these relationships are mediated by work meaningfulness. Our study sample consisted of 263 employees. We implemented a longitudinal design with three data collection points. Path analysis results showed that career identity was positively and directly related to both dimensions of wellbeing, whereas social capital and human capital were positively and indirectly related to them via work meaningfulness. Personal adaptability was neither directly nor indirectly related to eudaimonic wellbeing. Our findings advance the theory on antecedents of EEW and its integration with vocational psychology by clarifying how and why employability influences eudaimonic wellbeing at work. The study highlights the importance of employees' employability, specifically career identity, social capital, and human capital, in fostering EWW.

Meaningful academic work: human resource practices and faculty purpose

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

Abstract: Purpose – This study explores how high-performance work practices (HPWPs) can do more than enhance performance—they can help faculty members find meaning, purpose, and psychological strength in their professional lives. By focusing on the academic workplace, it investigates how HPWPs support the development of spiritual intelligence (SI), through the energizing effects of employee engagement and psychological capital (PsyCap), while considering how personal traits like job crafting and emotional intelligence (EI) shape this process. Design/methodology/approach – Survey data were collected from 456 faculty members across diverse Indian higher education institutions. After validating the measures, the study used moderated mediation analyses to test the relationships between the core constructs. Findings – The results reveal that HPWPs boost both engagement and PsyCap, with engagement acting as a key stepping-stone. Faculty who feel supported and energized are more likely to develop the psychological resources needed to approach work with meaning, coherence, and purpose. Importantly, the effects of HPWPs are even stronger when individuals actively shape their roles (job crafting) and demonstrate emotional sensitivity (EI). The study confirms that institutional support and individual agency work hand-in-hand to nurture spiritual intelligence at work. Originality/value – This research offers a fresh perspective on how organizational practices can foster not only better work outcomes, but better people. By connecting workplace systems with deeper human needs—engagement, resilience, purpose—it reveals new ways to design academic environments that are both high-performing and deeply human. The study opens new conversations about how institutions can cultivate personal growth, not just professional output.

“ Faculty who feel supported and energized are more likely to develop the psychological resources needed to approach work with meaning, coherence, and purpose ”

Making their work mean something is step 1! Understanding the relation between meaningful work and turnover intention through the serial mediation of work and organizational engagement

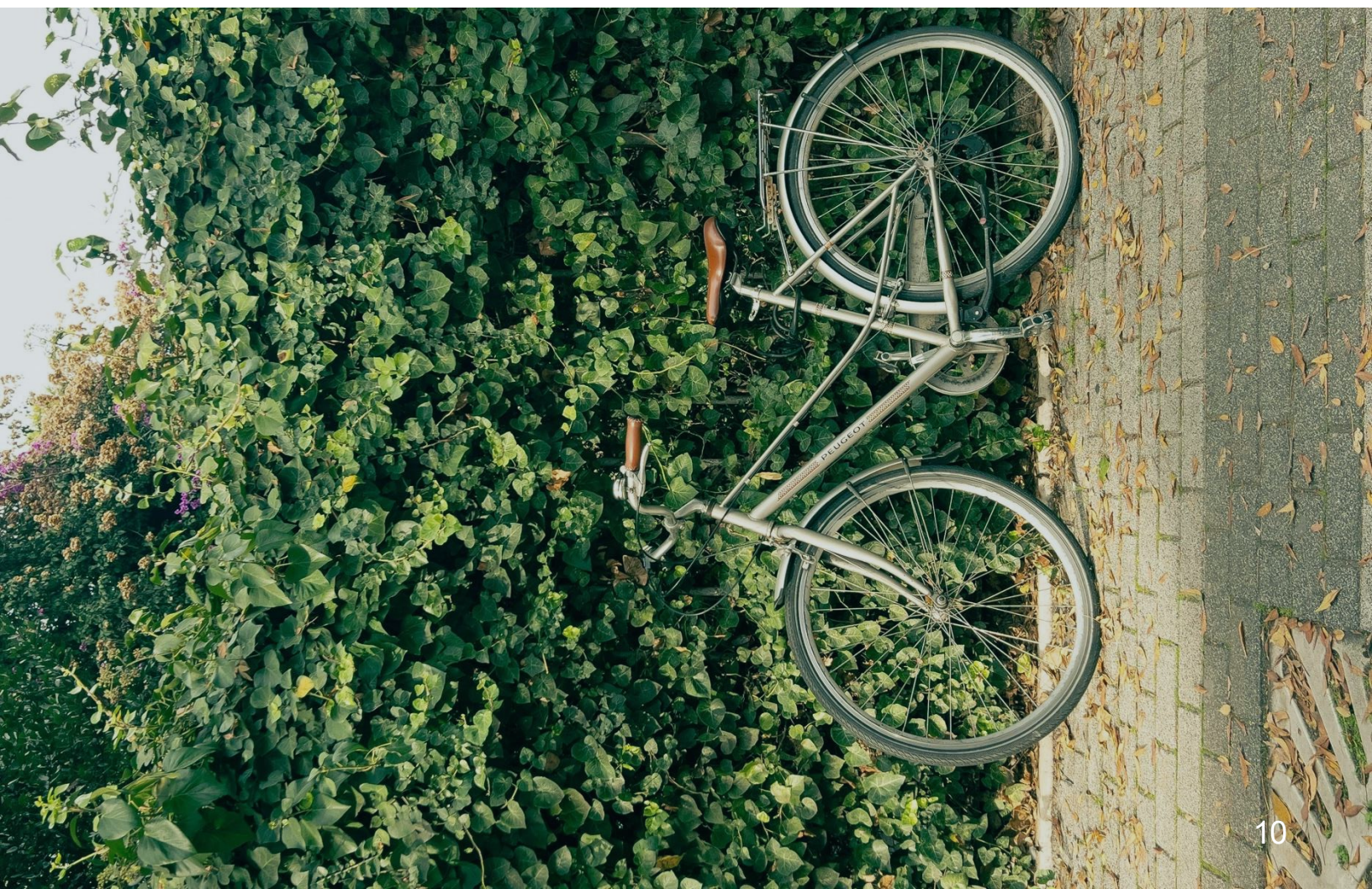
Journal of Management and Organization, JCR Q2 [see online](#)

Abstract: Turnover intention constitutes a challenge for organizations. Meaningful work and employee engagement can reduce turnover intention, but their relationship is complex. This study aims to understand how meaningful work, work and organizational engagement, and turnover intention interact with each other. Using a structural equation model with data from 562 employees, meaningful work was examined as the independent variable, turnover intention as the dependent variable, and work and organizational engagement as serial mediators. Results show that work engagement partially mediates the relationship between meaningful work and organizational engagement, and organizational engagement partially mediates the link between work engagement and turnover intention. Additionally, a serial mediation effect of work and organizational engagement on the relationship between meaningful work and turnover intention was confirmed. Therefore, we encourage organizations to provide meaningfulness to their employees' jobs and engage them within their job and organization not only to promote retention, but also to develop an engaged, healthy and sustainable workforce that supports both organizational sustainability and general societal well-being.

“

Employees first experience engagement towards their work and then this engagement translates into an involvement and connection towards their organization.

”



Articles (2)

Loneliness Is Reshaping Your Workplace

Kristin Gleitsman & Luis Velasquez, HBR [see online](#)

Loneliness is rising globally and increasingly shaping workplace dynamics. The article argues that disconnection is not an individual weakness but a structural issue amplified by hybrid work, reduced informal interactions, and technology-mediated communication. Loneliness undermines trust, initiative, creativity, and team cohesion—threatening performance and contributing to burnout and attrition. Leaders must therefore treat connection as a strategic responsibility, embedding it into daily work. The authors propose building shared identity, designing collaboration that fosters trust, modeling humanity, creating systems and rituals that operationalize belonging, and acknowledging leaders' own need for connection. Addressing loneliness is not “soft”—it is essential infrastructure for resilient, innovative, high-performing teams.

“ A hallway chat or post-meeting walk once offered easy connection, but hybrid and remote work have stripped those moments away ”

How to Create Harmony Between Your Personal and Professional Goals

Jiabi Wang & Ayelet Fishbach, HBR [see online](#)

The article explains that people often juggle multiple life goals—career, family, health, leisure—but this does not need to create constant conflict. The authors introduce the concept of goal harmony, which occurs when individuals see how their goals support or complement each other. Across multiple international studies, people who identified connections between their goals reported higher motivation, lower stress and burnout, and greater persistence in pursuing their resolutions. Goal harmony can be cultivated by mentally integrating goals, identifying activities that advance several aims at once, and understanding cultural influences on goal perceptions. While conflict is sometimes inevitable and even useful, the most successful individuals strategically weave their goals together rather than choosing between them.

“ Pursuing a career need not mean constant tension with everything else. Work-life balance doesn't have to feel like life is in constant dissonance. It can feel like a symphony. ”

Articles (2)

Identify Your Core Values to Make Better Leadership Decisions

Robert Glazer, HBR [see online](#)

In high-stakes situations where there's no clear playbook, leaders regularly face tough choices with steep trade-offs. In these moments, personal core values can be a powerful, underutilized guide for making decisions and executing them. But you can't rely on your values until you define what they are. Here are six questions to help you think through and define your own personal core values. Leaders who rely on their core values when making tough decisions will deliver better returns than shortcuts, spin, virtue signaling, and corporate platitudes ever could. Most importantly, focusing on your core values can foster trust that compounds over time, strengthening both your own conviction and the confidence others have in you.



Why You Need Systems Thinking Now

Tima Bansal & Julian Birkinshaw, HBR [see online](#)

Business has made huge strides in advancing economic and social prosperity in recent decades through innovative technologies and new ways of working. But many of those innovations have costs. For example, plastics are used to make many convenient and low-cost consumer products, but they create huge problems for both terrestrial and marine ecosystems and find their way into thousands of kinds of animals, including humans. Fracking technology has kept the price of oil low, but it has harmful effects on water resources and contributes to air pollution and other environmental problems. In finance, credit default swaps were invented to help investors hedge credit risk, but they ended up precipitating the 2008 global financial crisis.



