

Leading with purpose

The mindset and techniques leaders need to discover, embed, and operationalise their organisation's purpose.

Purpose-led Leadership

Purpose-led leadership aims to deliver greater value to a broader range of stakeholders compared to traditional business models through aligning an organisation's core values and beliefs with its daily operations.

In practice, it acts as a guiding principle for decision-makers from the boardroom to the frontline, helping them move with pace and resolve through the volatile environment we face today.

Discover and Commit



Now is the time

With COVID-19 and the subsequent economic tumult, the simplicity of the crisis will give way to the more complex paths that lead to growth. Purpose allows organisations to move with agility and pace, innovating (in both big and small ways) in an aligned way.



Finding your purpose

Purpose-driven leadership begins with the self and a conscious effort to discover one's own purpose. Start with asking yourself: What gives my work meaning? What are my values and how do they align with my organisation? The current situation may give your answers more clarity than usual.



Your purpose counts

Ultimately, if a leader cannot connect to the purpose of an organisation the relationship between the two will inevitably fall apart, creating tension along the way. Leaders must either commit to the organisation's existing purpose or buy into the process of shaping a relevant one.



Other people count more

If a leader can't get people to buy into the organisation's purpose, it can only ever be effective by degrees and never sustainable. Making people part of the process of discovery, and refreshing that process regularly, will create commitment across the organisation.



The process

The process of discovering your organisation's purpose is very straightforward — you ask questions; both within your (entire) organisation and with outside sources. This can be facilitated by external consultants or done in-house, ultimately trying to get to the answer of the question; why does this organisation exist?



Don't get vague, commit

Workshops and open-ended question scenarios can leave leaders with a huge amount of qualitative data, often contradictory. Your purpose — and purpose statement — will be defined as much by what you don't include as what you do, so it's important not to be vague and unclear.



Allow for cynicism

Organisations, big and small, are made up of people with different motivations and wants. Leaders need to act and communicate with skill and not alienate people with overly utopian statements. Authenticity and honesty are the best weapons against cynicism (and indeed will help harness it).



Testing your purpose

A leader should run through past decisions and apply their proposed purpose to that situation. Would the outcome have been better? If you've defined it correctly, it will 'feel right' and able to be consistently applied across the board. Talk to people in and out of the organisation; you will soon know if you've got it.

Operationalise your Purpose



Revisit the value proposition

Revisiting the value proposition at a senior level will ensure that the organisation's leaders are working from the same mindset. By answering these fundamental questions, day-to-day challenges can be solved with clarity and focus.



Reimagine your organisation

The current global disruption has left many leaders asking themselves what their organisation will look like on the other side. Rather, leaders must ask what the organisation *should* be on the other side — using the organisation's purpose to guide how you get there.



Define metrics

What doesn't get measured doesn't get managed, and purpose is no different. Defining your metrics beyond the bottom-line — 'people, planet and profit' is a common set of broad metrics used by organisations — will encourage actions around them.



Incentivise purpose

Broadening your metrics will also allow you to incentivise people in the organisation that usually are left in the cold when it comes to incentive schemes. This will encourage innovative ideas from areas you may not expect and create an atmosphere where continuous improvement is rewarded everywhere.



Recruit for purpose

An organisation with a strong, clear purpose will essentially allow candidates to self-select and help you attract those who match your purpose. The danger here is that you exclude candidates that have diverse attitudes and opinions that would constructively challenge your purpose.



Onboard with purpose

Purpose should be central to the onboarding process. Be careful with language and positioning, like using empty statements, as it may become counter-productive. Instead, share stories about how the purpose has guided your organisation in new and exciting directions.



Empower decision-makers

Purpose can play a key role in executing strategies with agility. By empowering decision-makers with the purpose of the organisation as an arbiter of decisions, backing their decisions up, strategies will be executed at the frontline with the same strategic mindset of the boardroom.



Recommit regularly

Creating organisation 'champions', hosting regular workshops around the subject and sharing stories around how someone lived the purpose are all ways leaders can keep the conversation around the organisation's purpose alive and evolving. Don't let it become a statement on a page.