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KNITTER AND
ASSOCIATES

White Paper

The Power of Purpose

Building Organizational Resilience and Success

April 2024

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Executive Summary

In the contemporary BANI world – characterized by brittleness, anxiety, nonlinearity, and incomprehensibility – organizations are exploring strategies to set themselves apart and cultivate a corporate culture of resilience. Purpose, the guiding principle that defines an organization's reason for existence, can serve as a powerful driver for creating a unique and resilient corporate culture.

This white paper “The Power of Purpose – Building Organizational Resilience and Success” emerges as a pivotal analysis, demonstrating how the adoption of a purpose-driven culture significantly propels organizational success. It embarks on a comprehensive journey, unraveling the critical transition from traditional profit-centric models to purpose-centric paradigms, underscoring the growing demand among consumers and employees for meaningful engagement with work and brands.

The narrative weaves through the multiple benefits of embedding purpose at the core of corporate ethos – from sharpening competitive edges, guiding strategic decision-making, and fostering employee engagement to attracting top talent and spurring innovation. It highlights the indispensable role of purpose in cultivating resilience, emphasizing its capacity to navigate businesses through the complexities of the modern market.

Central to the discourse is the instrumental role of leadership in championing purpose-driven transformation. Through exemplary leadership practices, the paper illustrates how purpose can be effectively communicated and embodied within organizations, inspiring entire teams and embedding a sense of shared values and objectives.

Delving into the operationalization of purpose, this white paper provides a pragmatic roadmap for its integration into the organizational framework. Drawing on Kotter’s 8-Step Model, it outlines a strategic approach to embedding purpose into every facet of business operations, from aligning strategy and processes to measuring progress and fostering a culture of continuous improvement.

Concluding with key takeaways, the white paper crystallizes the essence of purpose in driving not just business success, but also making a positive societal and environmental impact. It champions the shift towards a purpose-oriented approach as foundational for building a resilient, innovative, and ethically grounded corporate culture that thrives on both financial success and meaningful contributions to the wider community.

“The Power of Purpose – Building Organizational Resilience and Success” stands as an essential guide for leaders navigating the complexities of the contemporary business environment, offering a clear blueprint for leveraging purpose as a strategic asset to achieve sustainable success and a lasting positive legacy.

Introduction

The shift in values from “profit-oriented” to “purpose-oriented” permeated both the psychological, scientific, medical, and business domains: Psychologists describe this as the path to happiness¹; scientists have identified it as essential for mental health and well-being²; doctors have found that people who have found meaning in life live healthier and longer lives³, and business experts emphasize that finding meaning is a key to exceptional success of organizations.

An article on HR Daily Advisor mentions that “82% of employees feel an organization’s purpose is important, 70% say their work defines their sense of purpose” and that “Organizations can create and perpetuate a culture that not only attracts and retains talent but also [...] helps employees understand how their day-to-day work impacts society”.⁴

It is crucial to go beyond merely satisfying employees; they should be motivated to surpass their limits. Similarly, engaging customers and integrating their feedback is essential. The organization also needs to address the expectations of suppliers, societal needs, government regulations, and the interests of various shareholders. Embedding a central purpose within the organization is key to aligning and managing these diverse stakeholder interests, fosters innovation, and drives growth.⁵

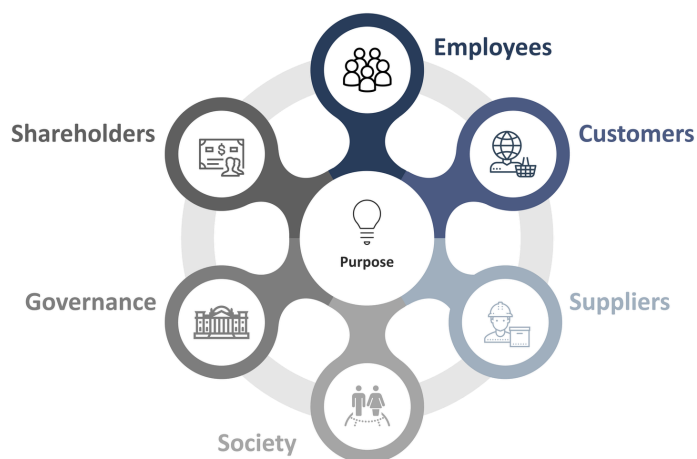


Figure 1. Importance of organizational purpose in coordinating activities among stakeholders

[1] Cf. Adolescent Moral Development Lab, 2018.

[2] Cf. Kim, Shiba, Boehm et al., 2020.

[3] Cf. Nygren, Aléx, Jonsén et al., 2005.

[4] Cf. Ulteig, 2023.

[5] Cf. Knitter, 2023.

Achieving a strong corporate culture that sets an organization apart from others can be accomplished through the integration and alignment of purpose, vision, and mission.

Having the combination of a well-defined purpose, vision, mission, culture, and strategy is what makes companies successful and inspiring. To date, there are many different definitions and understandings of these terms, as well as a lack of clarity on how they interplay. To clarify and distinguish them, they will be introduced in the following sections.

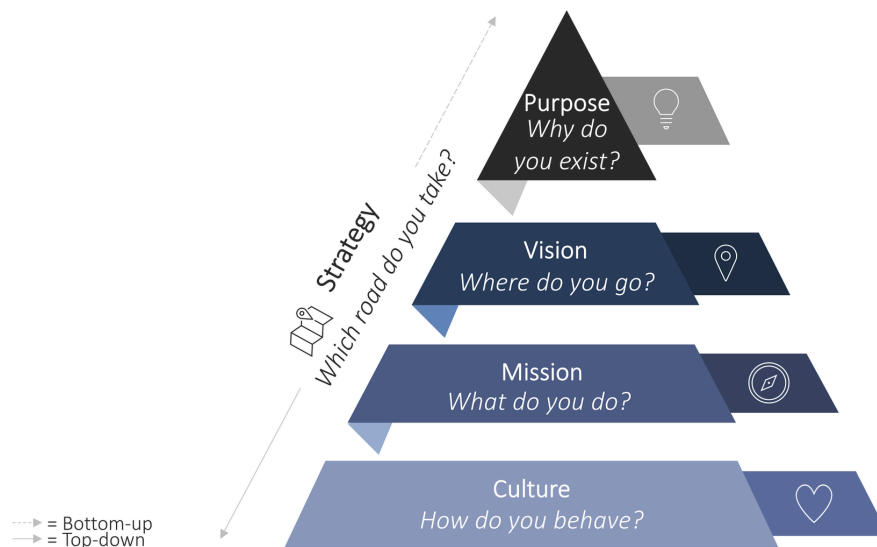


Figure 2. Combining purpose, vision, mission, culture, and strategy, through the K&A target model for a holistic concept

Purpose, on the one hand, defines the reason for an organization's existence and serves to motivate team members and stakeholders. It embodies the meaningfulness of tasks and should be formulated in an authentic, simple, individual, and future-oriented way. Vision, on the other hand, represents a desired end state that's anchored in the future and towards which every team member strives to work. It's a concise, short sentence that guides every team member's direction and should, therefore, be ambitious and inspiring but realistic.

Mission, meanwhile, focuses on present activities and the organization's responsibility to organize activities and achieve the vision's great goal. All team members should be involved in its formulation to ensure that everyone understands their role in the mission. This way, everyone is involved, and the mission distinctly sets the organization apart from others with similar business models. Culture is synonymous with the character of an organization and is crucial to long-term success. Fundamentally, shared principles of operation and values, and social norms, influence every action and emotion of team members. A good culture achieves mutual support, strong team spirit, collegiality, and a good reputation. Under these conditions, team members are willing to deliver excellent performance and achieve set goals.

The strategy answers the question "Which road do you take?". In doing so, the organization must carefully plan the implementation of the mission to ensure that it achieves its goal. A good strategy includes both

the strategic objectives and the operational measures necessary to achieve them. From this perspective, the strategy encompasses the purpose, vision, mission, and culture. The strategy helps team members focus and align their actions with the organization's goals. This white paper will delve into the idea of purpose as the guiding north star and its significance in building a robust corporate culture.

The Importance of Purpose in Corporate Culture

Since the mid-2010s, the business world has witnessed a paradigm shift towards the integration of purpose and ethical practices within corporate strategies. Leading this transformation, LEGO Group, Patagonia and Salesforce have set benchmarks for success by aligning every aspect of their operations with their core mission.

The LEGO Group, renowned for its toy bricks, has built its corporate ethos around fostering creativity and learning among children worldwide. The company's dedication to sustainability is evident in its pledge to produce all products from sustainable materials by 2032. This vision drives innovation at LEGO, as it seeks environmentally friendly alternatives to traditional materials, engaging customers, and stakeholders in its journey toward sustainability. The LEGO Foundation further extends this impact by supporting children's right to play and learn, underlining the company's commitment to societal improvement.

Adding to this example, Patagonia, an outdoor apparel company, has been unwavering in its commitment to environmental sustainability, underpinned by its mission to "save our home planet". This commitment extends beyond words, as seen in its innovative products and environmental initiatives, which have not only earned customer loyalty but also established Patagonia as a leading voice in corporate environmental activism. Instead of "going public," Patagonia stated that they were "going purpose"⁶: Patagonia's voting shares – 100% of them – are transferred to the Patagonia Purpose Trust. Its board members advocate for the protection of Patagonia's corporate values. 100% of the non-voting shares are allocated to the Holdfast Collective, a non-profit organization dedicated to combating environmental and climate crises and preserving nature.

Similarly, Salesforce, a titan in cloud computing, has embraced a comprehensive approach to social responsibility, rooted in its "Ohana" culture, which highlights community and inclusivity. The company's 1-1-1 philanthropy model – donating 1% of Salesforce's equity, 1% of technology, and 1% of employee time to community causes – has made a tangible impact on society, enhancing Salesforce's reputation, and fostering a deeply engaged workforce.

[6] Cf. Patagonia Inc., n.d.

In the education sector, Salesforce ensures that disadvantaged youth have access to high-quality education, such as through career-connected schools. In the climate sector, Salesforce supports vulnerable communities in addressing and acting against the impacts of climate change.⁷

The LEGO Group, Patagonia and Salesforce demonstrate how deeply ingrained purpose can lead to remarkable business achievements and societal contributions. This approach not only enhances brand reputation and customer loyalty but also sets a new standard for organizations in the 21st century, not only proving that they can thrive by doing good, but that they can achieve competitive advantage and sustained success as a result.

Integrating Purpose for a prosperous Future

In the organizational ecosystem, the purpose forms the thread that interweaves diverse strands of organizational components, creating a cohesive and resilient structure that is responsive to the varied demands of the contemporary business environment. The far-reaching impact of purpose-driven models becomes apparent when considering their influence on different aspects of organizational life, such as employee well-being, customer loyalty, sustainability efforts, diversity and inclusion initiatives, and employee training and development.

Employee well-being

In a purpose-driven corporate culture, purpose-aligned training fosters employee engagement by imparting the company's purpose. Such training aids employees in understanding how their daily tasks contribute to the company's overarching purpose. Consequently, they can better identify with the purpose and are motivated to promote it in their work. Additionally, purpose plays a crucial role in attracting and retaining top talent, as it creates a unique identity.

Furthermore, a culture aligned with the organization's purpose plays a vital role in enhancing employee well-being. It provides individuals with a sense of meaning and direction, which is essential for mental health. Employees who perceive their work as contributing to a greater good experience increased job satisfaction and overall well-being.⁸

Continuous learning and development programs, tailored to the organizational purpose, are essential for equipping employees with the necessary skills and knowledge to excel in their roles, adapt to evolving industry demands, and contribute effectively to the company's success. These programs enhance employee competencies and instill a sense of purpose and motivation, enabling them to contribute

[7] Cf. Salesforce Inc., n.d.

[8] Cf. Great Place to Work Institute Inc., 2023.

more effectively to the organization's goals. Investing in employee development allows organizations to foster a culture of continuous improvement and adaptability, crucial for navigating the rapidly changing business landscape.⁹

A purpose-driven environment not only acknowledges individual contributions but also values them, which significantly contributes to reducing stress and preventing burnout.¹⁰ Additionally, a purpose-driven culture promotes positive relationships and collaboration, creating a sense of community and belonging.

Customer loyalty

Purpose-driven organizations tend to foster stronger customer loyalty as they align their products, services, and customer interactions with their core values and mission. When customers identify with an organization's purpose and values, they are more likely to remain loyal, even in a competitive market. This alignment between organizational purpose and customer values can lead to enhanced customer satisfaction, increased customer retention, and positive word-of-mouth referrals, driving long-term success and sustainability for the organization.¹¹

Sustainability

Purpose-driven companies often prioritize sustainability and corporate social responsibility as integral components of their mission. By adopting sustainable practices and contributing to social and environmental well-being, these companies not only benefit the planet and society but also enhance their reputation among stakeholders. This commitment to sustainability can attract environmentally conscious customers, talents, and investors, creating a competitive advantage in the market. Furthermore, sustainable practices can lead to operational efficiencies and cost savings, contributing to long-term financial stability and success.¹²

Diversity and inclusion

A purpose-driven approach inherently values diversity and inclusion, recognizing the importance of leveraging diverse perspectives and experiences to achieve organizational goals. By fostering a culture of respect and acceptance, organizations can create an inclusive environment where all employees feel valued and heard. This inclusivity drives innovation and performance as diverse teams are more likely to generate creative solutions and make better decisions.¹³ Additionally, a diverse and inclusive workplace can attract a wider range of talent and appeal to a broader customer base, enhancing the organization's overall competitiveness and resilience.¹⁴

In conclusion, integrating purpose sets the stage for a thriving future within organizations, shaping employee well-being, customer loyalty, sustainability, and diversity and inclusion efforts.

[9] Cf. Great Place to Work Institute Inc., 2023.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Cf. Jump Associates, 2023.

[12] Cf. Gartenberg, 2021.

[13] Cf. Knitter, 2023.

[14] Cf. Hopke, 2023.

The Role of Leadership in driving Purpose

The conventional management approaches that follow the waterfall model are no longer yielding desired outcomes. Instead, thriving enterprises such as adidas, Airbnb, Ben & Jerry's and Lush have adopted purpose-driven leadership as a guiding philosophy. This style of leadership involves making decisions and driving innovation based on a company's values and goals, with purpose serving as a guiding principle.

In addition to the growing importance of purpose in companies, three-quarters of the Kienbaum survey respondents stated that having a clear purpose lead to higher employee satisfaction. According to Kienbaum's study, 66% of respondents reported improvements in employee retention, employer attractiveness, and overall performance. Additionally, organizations with a clearly defined purpose also experience enhanced customer attraction and drive innovation more effectively.¹⁵

However, formulating a clear purpose and ensuring that all facets of an organization align is a challenging endeavor. This is where leadership competencies play a crucial role. A diverse range of competencies is essential for leaders and their teams to work efficiently and with dedication towards achieving business objectives.

These competencies include abilities such as selecting the best solution for a situation from a variety of options, which leads to a high level of accountability, seeing oneself in interaction with others in a new light, and having a comprehensive understanding of leadership. Furthermore, gaining and giving trust, displaying integrity and consistency to serve as a role model, and being able to articulate the organization's purpose and consistently communicate it to employees at all levels of the organization are also significant competencies. Leaders should model behaviors and values that align with the organization's purpose, demonstrate their commitment to the cause, inspire others to follow suit, and empower employees to take ownership of their roles and responsibilities. By ensuring alignment across all aspects of the organization, from strategy to operations, leaders can foster a cohesive and integrated approach to achieving the company's goals.¹⁶

[15] Cf. Kienbaum, 2020.

[16] Cf. Knitter, 2024.

A Roadmap for implementing Purpose in Organizations

Implementing and sustaining a purpose-driven approach within organizations necessitates a holistic and strategic alignment of various organizational facets. It requires a meticulous orchestration of efforts, aligning various organizational facets with the overarching purpose, and ensuring that every strand of the organizational fabric resonates with the defined purpose. John Kotter's 8-step model provides a structured framework to navigate this transformation, offering a roadmap to integrate purpose seamlessly into the organizational ecosystem.

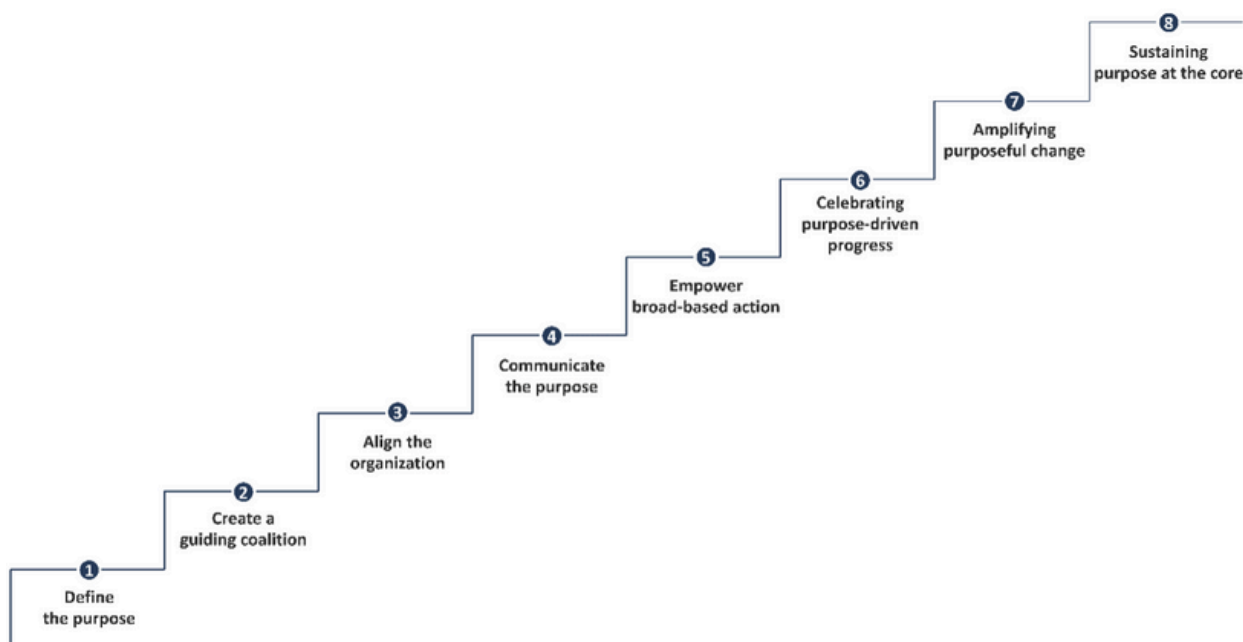


Figure 3. Application of Kotter's 8-step model for implementing purpose in organizations

Following Kotter, the following eight steps must be taken to successfully implement purpose in organizations:

1. Define the purpose

The first step necessitates leaders to forge a compelling narrative for change, resonating with the intrinsic and extrinsic organizational dynamics. Kotter's first step, "create urgency", serves as a model for the initial stage. The process of defining purpose mandates extensive consultations with a spectrum of stakeholders, encompassing employees, customers, and shareholders. This collaborative dialogue is instrumental in sculpting a purpose that mirrors the organization's distinctive value proposition and its overarching aspirations. To maintain the vitality and relevance of this defined purpose, it is imperative to engage in regular reassessments and refinements, attuning it to the evolving market landscapes, shifting customer

predilections, and the dynamic feedback from employees. This iterative refinement ensures the sustained resonance and relevance of the organizational purpose in a perpetually evolving business environment.

2. Build a guiding coalition

In alignment with the second step of Kotter's model, "form a powerful coalition", leaders are tasked with assembling a strategic guiding coalition, a diverse and influential unit endowed with the requisite skills, credibility, and networks essential for orchestrating transformative change. This coalition should represent a rich mosaic of individuals from varied echelons and domains within the organization, all united under the banner of a shared purpose. The establishment of such a coalition is pivotal, serving as the bedrock upon which leaders can secure the essential backing and resources imperative for realizing their purpose-driven objectives. Integral to this process is commitment to regular and meaningful interactions with many stakeholders.

3. Align the organization

After defining the purpose, it is imperative to align every facet of the organization – its strategy, structure, and operations – with this newly established purpose. This alignment is synonymous with Kotter's third step, "create a vision and strategic initiatives", where a clear and encompassing strategy is developed to manifest the desired change. This alignment may necessitate revising the company's mission and vision, recalibrating values, and modifying internal policies and processes to ensure congruence with the defined purpose. To maintain this alignment, it is crucial to conduct regular assessments of organizational activities, comparing them against the defined purpose. These assessments will serve as a barometer for alignment and will highlight areas that may require adjustments. By doing so, the organization can ensure that its actions and initiatives are consistently in harmony with its purpose, allowing for real-time refinements based on continuous feedback and evolving organizational needs.

4. Communicate the purpose

Creating a purpose-driven culture necessitates the clear and effective communication of the organization's purpose to all stakeholders, including employees, customers, and the broader community. This aligns with Kotter's fourth step, "communicate the change vision", emphasizing the importance of conveying the purpose and vision comprehensively and coherently. Achieving this involves regular internal communications, external branding, and public relations efforts, ensuring that the purpose is consistently presented and understood across all organizational levels and touchpoints. Moreover, maintaining open and transparent communication channels is pivotal, allowing stakeholders to stay informed about the progress and developments related to purpose-driven initiatives. This transparency in communication fosters trust and alignment among stakeholders, reinforcing the commitment to the organizational purpose.

Additionally, the purpose must be seamlessly integrated into every aspect of organizational culture. This includes embedding purpose within recruitment processes, onboarding programs, performance management systems, and employee development initiatives. Such cultural integration ensures that the purpose is ingrained in the organizational fabric, guiding behaviors, and decision-making processes across the entity, thereby fostering a truly purpose-driven organizational environment.

5. Empower broad-based action

In this step – in alignment with Kotter’s fifth step “empower action” – the focus is on systematically identifying and removing barriers that could hinder the adoption and promotion of the purpose within the organization. Only then can all employees do their best. To this end, leaders should create a work environment that encourages initiative and active participation in realizing and embodying the purpose. This requires not just the elimination of organizational hurdles but also providing the necessary resources and support so that employees can thrive in a purpose-driven culture. For example, a leader could initiate regular idea competitions to encourage employees to develop innovative solutions aligned with the company's purpose. Additionally, the company could offer training and development programs aimed at enhancing employees' skills in alignment with the company's purpose. The continuous adaptation and promotion of such an environment help strengthen the organization's alignment with its purpose and establish a culture of continuous improvement and adaptability.

6. Celebrate purpose-driven progress

Creating and celebrating immediate impacts highlights the importance of acknowledging and leveraging small, purpose-aligned successes as a means of building momentum. This sixth step aligns with Kotter’s step “generate short-term wins”. Such initiatives encourage the identification of tangible outcomes that reflect the organization’s purpose in action. By spotlighting specific projects or initiatives that embody the company's purpose and achieve quick, visible benefits, leaders can enhance enthusiasm and commitment to the purpose-driven journey. This could involve initiatives like launching a significant sustainability project or a community program that aligns with the organization's values. Celebrating these early victories not only boosts morale but also visibly demonstrates the positive impact of the organization's purpose, encouraging continued engagement and support.

7. Amplify purposeful change

Expanding the horizon of purposeful change echoes Kotter's step seven “build on the change”, by using initial successes as a platform for more extensive, purpose-driven transformation across the organization. This stage involves broadening the scope of purpose-aligned initiatives, deepening the integration of purpose into business processes, and ensuring new endeavors resonate with the organizational purpose. Leaders play a pivotal role here, maintaining the initiative's momentum by promoting a culture of innovation and commitment to the purpose. It's about moving beyond initial wins to embed purpose at the heart of the organization’s operations and strategy, fostering an environment where the purpose is lived and breathed in every action and decision.

8. Sustain purpose at the core

Embedding purpose in the organizational DNA aligns with Kotter’s eighth step, “make it stick”, ensuring the organizational purpose becomes an enduring part of culture and operations. This phase solidifies purpose as a core element of the organizational identity, guiding strategic decisions, daily operations, and individual behaviors. It emphasizes the infusion of purpose into every aspect of talent management –

recruitment, onboarding, performance management, and employee development – to cultivate a workforce deeply aligned with the organizational purpose. Leadership development is key, equipping leaders to champion purpose and ensure it permeates organizational strategies and practices. Simultaneously, to maintain relevance in the BANI world, organizations must embody adaptability. This involves continuously refining and adapting their purpose to ensure it remains a driver of corporate culture and performance. Being attuned to market trends, customer needs, and employee feedback is crucial. Incorporating a culture of continuous learning and innovation is essential, fostering an environment responsive to change. This dual focus on embedding purpose deeply within the organization's practices and continuously adapting it ensures the long-term sustainability of purpose-driven initiatives.

Implementing a purpose-driven approach is a dynamic and multifaceted journey, requiring strategic alignment and continuous refinement within organizations. John Kotter's 8-step model offers a structured roadmap, guiding entities in embedding purpose at their core, fostering intrinsic alignment with organizational ethos and values.

Five Key Take-aways

Embarking on the journey of integrating purpose into organizations yields transformative outcomes, fostering a resilient and distinguished corporate culture that fuels performance, resilience, and innovation. Through precise definition of purpose, organizational alignment, and unwavering emphasis on its importance, leaders possess the ability to ignite inspiration among employees and stakeholders, uniting them under a common purpose.

By embracing purpose as a cornerstone of their corporate ethos, organizations distinguish themselves in the marketplace, draw in and retain top-tier talent, and nurture a workforce passionately committed to the company's prosperity.

Here are our top five key takeaways that we strongly recommend when cultivating a purpose-driven culture:

1. Shift from “profit-oriented” to “purpose-oriented”

The shift from “profit-oriented” to “purpose-oriented” values is pervasive across various domains, including psychology, science, medicine, and business. It is recognized as essential for happiness, mental health, and organizational success.

2. The importance of purpose in corporate culture

The LEGO Group, Patagonia, and Salesforce serve as prime examples of purpose-driven organizations, seamlessly integrating their purpose into every aspect of their operations. Their unwavering commitment to societal improvement and environmental sustainability sets a new standard for corporate success in the 21st century.

3. Integrating purpose for a promising/healthy/prosperous future

A purpose-driven corporate culture enhances employee well-being, customer loyalty, sustainability, diversity and inclusion, and employee development. It aligns organizational values with mission and vision.

4. The role of leadership in driving purpose

Leadership competencies play a vital role in aligning organizations with their purpose. Companies such as adidas, Airbnb, Ben & Jerry's, and Lush are shining examples that have recognized and experienced the benefits of purpose-driven leadership in action.

Adidas's purpose is to expand the limits of human possibilities, to include and unite people in sport, and to create a more sustainable world.¹⁷ To achieve this, adidas concentrates on inclusive sports initiatives and sustainable practices, focusing on innovation and community engagement to make sports accessible for all. They aim to significantly reduce environmental impact, for example, by using only recycled plastic since 2024. In their purpose-driven leadership, they promote implementation through the employee training program "How to Think and Act Sustainably".¹⁸

Airbnb adopts a purpose-driven approach to create a world where anyone can belong anywhere, aiming to become a comprehensive travel platform that supports every aspect of traveling. They prioritize community, quality accommodations, and unique experiences.¹⁹ This purpose is evident in their initiatives towards social responsibility, diversity, and inclusion, as well as environmental protection.

Ben & Jerry's purpose-driven approach is rooted in driving positive social and ecological change through their business (ice cream).²⁰ This is reflected in their partnerships with NGOs and other organizations addressing the challenges that are important to Ben & Jerry's.

Lush pursues a purpose-driven approach by producing ethical and sustainable cosmetics that promote the well-being of people, animals, and the environment.²¹ In 2021, Lush temporarily closed all their social media channels to demonstrate their commitment to minimizing harmful impacts on society.²²

[17] Cf. Adidas America Inc., n.d.

[18] Cf. Adidas AG, 2021.

[19] Cf. Airbnb Inc., 2019.

[20] Cf. Ben & Jerry's Homemade Inc., n.d.

[21] Cf. Lush Ltd, n.d.

[22] Cf. Meléndez, 2023.

5. A roadmap for implementing purpose in organizations

Implementing purpose requires its definition, building a guiding coalition, aligning the organization, communicating the purpose, empowering broad-based actions, celebrating purpose-driven progress, amplifying purposeful change and sustaining purpose at the core. John Kotter's 8-step model provides a structured roadmap for this journey.

In summary, it can be stated that purpose is one of the pillars of corporate culture, responsible for sustainable success, collective performance across all leadership and employees, innovation, and resilience. When companies align all activities with purpose, promote and embody purpose-driven leadership, this paves the way for differentiation, attracts top talent, and strengthens the commitment and loyalty of employees and stakeholders. Implementing purpose within the organization is not just a strategic decision but the foundation for a promising future.

About K&A

K&A is a management consulting firm specializing in Strategy & Organization, Transformation & Digitalization, M&A & PMI, Project Management & PMO, and the K&A Target Model.

Our purpose: We help to create a better business world for a better tomorrow than today. We envision enabling our clients to overcome their limits and to achieve excellence. Providing impact that matters by delivering value, inspiring people and improving performance - that's our mission.

Our team consists of experienced international consultants dedicated to delivering operational excellence by living our core values of ownership, discipline, commitment, integrity, and passion. We work closely with clients to define their purpose, vision, mission, strategy, and culture. Headquartered in Düsseldorf, we have a global presence and provide on-site interaction for maximum impact.

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Knitter & Associates GmbH
Dreischeibenhaus 1
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Germany