

EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP ON/WITH PURPOSE:
UNCOVERING AN EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION MODEL FOR PURPOSE-DRIVEN
LEADERSHIP

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Abstract

This research presents a model for effective leadership in an economy and society increasingly demanding attention to a triple bottom line. Successful purpose-driven leadership requires three interlocking features, none more important than the other but needing to be built in succession, namely: a strong sense of personal values that reflect corporate purpose, deliberate and meaningful engagement with employees on corporate purpose, and finally, an authentic and reflective external communication strategy. Through an employee survey and interviews with six Chief Executive Officers leading growing tech companies, the research uncovered the importance of purpose-driven communication for leaders looking to attract and motivate a high-performing team and navigate the challenges inherent to a growing company. It also highlighted the centrality of the role of the CEO in communicating messaging around purpose, and the importance of personal conviction and authenticity.

Keywords: leadership, corporate social purpose, CEO, communications, authenticity, employee motivation, CSR

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Introduction

Consumers want more responsible capitalism (Lai et al, 2010; Tetrault Sirsly & Lvina, 2019; Barton et al, 2018; GLG, 2020), employees want to work for companies where they feel they contribute to something greater than profit (Glavas & Piderit, 2019; Peterson, 2004; Alonso-Almeida, 2018; Smith, 2016; Resh et al, 2017) and regulators and legislators, facing a stream of social and environmental crises, are increasingly looking at the levers of corporate citizenship to right some of the wrongs of unfettered capitalism (United Nations, 2021; Edelman, 2018). In response, corporate social responsibility is evolving from what is considered at best a traditional mechanism for giving back to community and at worse cynical press pageantry (Wagner et al, 2009). More and more, corporations are engaging with concepts of a triple bottom line and of Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) commitments as well as a redefinition of capitalism from shareholder to stakeholder primacy (Aguinis, 2011; Ong et al, 2018; Glenday, 2019; Business for Purpose Report, 2022).

These are challenging, complex, and fast-moving waters for corporations to navigate and Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) must strike a delicate balance: between shareholder expectations and a social license to operate, brand reputation and increased demand for social action, and growth and innovation and increasing regulatory scrutiny. Compounding the pressure is a social media landscape underpinned by citizen activism and disinformation alike, demanding authenticity, transparency, and genuine commitment. In response, a new brand of leader is emerging, one that recognizes the duty, the risk, and the opportunity, of purpose-driven leadership. Hand in hand with these new values and approaches must come communications strategies and approaches that are a proper fit for the delicate road ahead.

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Literature Review

The purpose-driven corporation

For purpose-driven corporations, profit and social impact are interlinked and mutually reinforcing. For some, profitability is no more than the means to a greater, social end (Siebold, 2021; Henderson, 2021; Henderson & Van den Steen, 2015; Bartlett & Goshal, 1994), though other purpose-driven corporations still retain the framing of shareholder primacy while recognizing the interdependence of profit and the social license to operate (Levillain & Segrestin, 2019). Corporate social purpose is often expressed as a triple bottom line of people, planet, and profit, deliberately focused on “enhancing the wellbeing and prosperity of shareholders, society, and the natural world” (Mayer, 2021, p.889), or more simply, using business as a tool to make the world a better place.

The purpose-driven corporation stands in direct contrast to the dominant ethos of Milton Friedman, who argued that corporations are responsible only to their shareholders and exist purely to maximize profit (1962, 1970), a narrative conveniently leveraged for capitalist extremes and often exemplified by the 1980s cri de coeur “greed is good”. Today, while it might lack the nuance of the original narrative, Friedman’s framing is increasingly viewed as “actively dangerous (Henderson, 2021, p.839), and the root cause of an environmentally and socially unsustainable economy seduced by the false promise of endless economic growth.

Social purpose evolved from the more traditional and established concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR); first introduced in the 1950s. Perhaps a tonic for Friedman’s stern narrative, CSR offered an opportunity for the corporation to show regard for “social equilibrium” (Brondoni, 2014), by earning a social license to operate through decisions, policies, and practices that were consistent with the societal expectations and values of the day, as argued in the

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Howard R. Bowen's seminal 1953 book *Social Responsibilities of the Businessman*, reissued in 2013. This sense of responsibility continued through the 1960s as social and environmental movements began to take firmer shape and as thought leaders warned the private sector of the precarious nature of social power (Davis, 1960; Frederick, 1960). It was not, however, until the 1970s that CSR activities grew beyond the context of corporate philanthropy (Muirhead, 1999; Mosca & Civera, 2017).

By the mid-1980s, Freeman's stakeholder theory (1984) shifted the landscape for corporate social responsibility, encouraging institutionalization of the practice, an exploration into managerial actions, and a deeper engagement with the influence and impact of the corporation on society at large (Davenport, 2000, Mosca & Civera, 2017). This institutionalization of CSR was not purely altruistic. Social unrest in the 1970s prompted widespread social auditing of institutions and corporations, with the intention "both to help organizations improve their social performance and to flog corporations for their poor social performance" (Davenport, 2000 p.21).

The positioning of CSR as a strategic asset experienced another marked shift at the turn of the new millennium (Latapí Agudelo et al, 2019; Mayer, 2021; Mosca & Civera, 2017). The role of the corporation and the value and role of CSR received new attention as society and economies became increasingly globalized, as environmental and economic problems began to escalate, and as technological advances transformed the fabric of society. Two competing lenses attempted to make sense of this new context. The first was an instrumental and utilitarian conception of CSR, deployed to create competitive advantage, improve reputation, and build brand awareness (Mosca & Civera, 2017; Werther & Chandler, 2005; Porter & Kramer, 2006). The second was a more integrated approach, "a way to make business organisations core and active social and sustainable partners" (Mosca & Civera, 2017, p.17), an approach that would

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involve all business functions and the company's supply chain (Visser, 2012), and that would serve as a conduit for creating shared value (Heslin & Ochoa, 2008; Porter & Kramer, 2011). By 2012, the idea of "third generation CSR", where the corporation accepts its role and responsibility (Trapp, 2012) began to take root, appropriate groundwork for the Paris Agreement of 2015, a legally binding international treaty on climate change which would require active participation from the private sector and create new markets in order for governments to fulfill their mandates (Latapí Agudelo et al, 2019), and for the United Nations Social Development Goals, also launched in 2015, a set of 17 priority actions to reduce poverty, protect the planet, and ensure prosperity for all (United Nations, n.d.). It is from this second, integrative conception of Corporate Social Responsibility that the purpose-driven corporation finds kinship.

Today, the term "corporate social responsibility" is mostly associated with more transactional mechanisms for giving back to community or worse, with cynical press pageantry (Wagner, et al, 2009), the more altruistic or integrative interpretation of the practice ceding to new nomenclature. Today, CSR's cousin, Environmental, Social, and Governance measures, or ESG, is the expression of social responsibility most in vogue, though it concerns itself primarily with data-driven compliance activities that focus on material risks and opportunities (Novisto, 2022). Corporate social purpose, on the other hand, carries significantly deeper aims. Rather than risk management strategy purpose "is a reason for being, a social ambition, and a profit motive (Social Purpose Institute, 2020). It is about "finding ways of solving problems profitably where profits are defined net of the costs of avoiding and remedying problems", with a genuine commitment to "enhancing the wellbeing and prosperity of shareholders, society and the natural world" (Mayer 2021, p. 889).

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Regardless of the semantics or specific focus for doing good, the evolved corporation invites a re-examination, and perhaps a redefinition of capitalism from shareholder to stakeholder primacy (Aguinis, 2011; Ong et al, 2018; Glenday, 2019). In contexts where regulation is unable to keep pace with technological development and where community is treated as a variable to manage rather than an intrinsic part of a business' functioning, corporate purpose serves as a remedy, "improving the functioning of markets, addressing market failures and internalizing what are otherwise externalities" (Mayer, 2021, p.898). Research shows that purpose is increasingly good for business, particularly when it is deeply embedded within the corporation and serves as more than lofty aspiration or value statement. Embracing social impact drives sales and builds brand affinity (Lai et al, 2010; Tetrault Sirsly & Lvina, 2019) affecting every stage of the value chain, from customers to suppliers, employees to shareholders (Mayer, C. 2021). Purpose frameworks such as ESG brings financial returns, and companies with high levels of purpose outperform the market by five to seven percent per year (Gartenberg & Serafeim, 2019).

There are some debates and detractors of the corporate social purpose agenda. Bebchuk & Tallarita stand firm on the argument of shareholder primacy, positing that companies have no legitimate basis or effective means of balancing the needs and interests of competing stakeholders, whether consumer prices versus employee wages or environmental protection versus economic development, for example. Similarly, the Council of Institutional Investors argues that "accountability to everyone means accountability to no one" (2019), and that Government is and should remain the institution primarily responsible for defining and addressing societal objectives, leaving corporate accountable exclusively to their owners and to the real-world dynamic of public equity markets. This argument was echoed in the real world in

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2017 when former Chief Investment Officer of Black Rock Inc Tariq Fancy critiqued the financial investment community of which he was a part in the form of a widely covered op-ed, calling the multi-trillion-dollar ESG investment trend a cynical act of greenwashing, “little more than marketing hype, PR spin and disingenuous promises from the investment community” (Fancy, 2021). Fancy’s call for broad governmental regulation put him squarely at odds with his former employer, Black Rock CEO Larry Fink, one of the most influential leaders in the business for purpose movement, whose annual letter to CEOs celebrates the power of markets to prioritize climate action and sustainability both as a tremendous investment opportunity and a moral imperative (Fink, 2021), thus lending credibility to the concept of the triple bottom line and conscious or stakeholder capitalism (Aziz, 2019; Korngold, D., 2021; Maley, 2020; Sundheim & Starr, 2020). These arguments stand in stark contrast with those of the purpose movement, namely that “the efficient functioning of markets requires that the business of business is not just business and the governance of business is the business of government” (Mayer, 2021, pp. 888-9).

While these criticisms may well hold weight and serve to keep the purpose agenda accountable and genuine, one cannot deny that today’s consumers are increasingly turning to the business sector for solutions to our society’s complex problems. 62 percent of customers want companies to take a stand on issues like sustainability, transparency, or fair employment practices (Barton et al, 2018) and 47 percent will boycott a brand that does not. A deep alignment with the expectations of today’s consumers is a key feature of successful purpose-driven companies, building “deep connections with stakeholders and, in turn, amplify[ing] the company’s relevance in stakeholders’ lives” (Tiwari, 2021). This trend is likely to continue as Millennials and Gen Z are more likely than older generations to expect social action from the

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brands they support (Mullen, 2019); perhaps because they live in a world on the precipice of a climate crisis, are experiencing ever-rising income inequality, and are grappling with the corrosion of trust in the very institutions that underpin our society and democracy (Mayer, 2021, Chen & Marquis, 2022). In our Western capitalist system, business often serves as central fora for social interaction and personal fulfillment and perhaps because of its centrality in our collective lives and imagination, the corporation is viewed as critical to efforts to address the complex, seemingly intractable social issues of our time: “their responsibility for defining, creating, and distributing value makes corporations one of society's principal agents of social change” (Bartlett & Goshal, 1994, p.88). It seems only natural then that consumers have come to demand more responsible capitalism (Lai et al, 2010; Tetrault Sirsly & Lvina, 2019; Barton et al, 2018; GLG, 2020, Henderson, 2020a), that employees want to work for companies where they feel they contribute meaningfully to something greater than profit (Glavas & Piderit, 2019; Peterson, 2004; Alonso-Almeida, 2018; Smith, 2016; Resh et al, 2017; Archer et al, 2018) and that regulators and legislators, facing a seemingly constant stream of social and environmental crises, are increasingly looking at the levers of corporate citizenship to right some of the wrongs of unfettered capitalism (United Nations, 2021; Edelman, 2018).

True purpose-driven corporations however must move beyond aspirational statements toward concrete action that effectively re-imagines many of the foundational concepts of capitalism and ownership. At the heart of social purpose is authenticity, critical for the strategic alignment of purpose commitments with business and profit goals (Barton et al, 2019; Hewitt, 2020). As expectations of corporations evolve, so does the level of sophistication for corporations attempting to adopt a purpose mandate. Window dressing is no longer acceptable: “Slapping purpose on top of current business practice by adding a statement or two on the

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corporate website or annual report, making charitable donations or encouraging employees to volunteer are at best tokenistic” (Tiwari, 2021). ESG practitioners point to fundamentals, which may well apply to a larger purpose practice:

Adopt strategic ESG practices; create accountability structures for ESG integration; identify a corporate purpose and build a culture around it; make operational changes to ensure that the ESG strategy is successfully executed; and commit to transparency and relationship building with investors (Serafeim, 2020, p.5).

There are also calls for partnership across sectors, including governments and the non-profit sector (Edelman, 2020, Henderson, 2021). These multi-sector partnerships have the potential to strengthen each party as well as each sector, and “can both support companies’ existing work and open doors to something new” (Hewitt, 2020). Early purpose leaders can model new ways of engaging with their role in society, including treatment of employees, setting the bar for impact measurement, and raising public expectations, serving to both inspire others and to prompt systems change within their respective industries and the private sector at large (Henderson, 2021).

These increased expectations make the symbiotic relationship between public relations, strategic communication, and corporate purpose all the more critical: “public responsibility is understood as a basic, and sometimes synonymous, concept of public relations” (Kim & Kim, 2010, p.485). Grunig’s two-way symmetrical model of communication, the centrepiece of modern public relations theory and practice was developed in the 1980s, a time of growing pressure for public responsibility, the latter creating the necessary conditions for the development of the former (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). If corporate social responsibility is a tool for the corporation to maintain its social license to operate, whether from a utilitarian or integrative perspective, “it needs a communication link- a public relationship function to show what it has done to be responsible” (Grunig & Hunt, 1984, p.52). Further, if, as critics like Fancy suggest,

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ESG is riddled with greenwashing, and if concerns of purpose-washing continue to grow (Goleman, 2021; Willan, 2020), then authentic, ethical, and strategic communications are critical to helping corporations tell their story and build trust-based relationships with investors, regulators, and the public at large (Chen & Marquis, 2022). It is interesting to note that public relations practitioners report feeling a lack of agency in influencing or effectively supporting CSR practice without the expressed support of the dominant coalition: “it is viewed as significant and managerial, but a number of practitioners feel they lack influence and final authority in the process of program development” (Kim & Reber, 2008, p. 341).

To some extent, Public Relations’ evolution from press pageantry to more authentic models including stakeholder theory and symmetric communications mirrors and reinforces Corporate Social Responsibility’s own evolution, and as public relations practitioners call for a seat at the executive table in order to fully realize the potential and meet the responsibilities of a corporate strategic communication function (Berger & Reber, 2013), so too are there calls to ensure that purpose is deeply embedded in and aligned with business strategy, systems, and culture, from the top down (ANA, 2022).

While there is limited academic literature on the topic of corporate social purpose and strategic communications, if social good is the *raison d’être* of a purpose-driven corporation, then it is reasonable to expect that communication, as an essential function and bridge to stakeholders, must be fully integrated and follow the same tenets of trust and authenticity, lest the messaging undermine the purpose. Here, the delicate balancing act of ensuring that strategic communications remain integrative and grounded in the company’s social purpose, rather than function as a utilitarian public relations exercise, is particularly fraught:

To devise the public interest as opposed to divine the public interest is to forever taint the patronage of a supposed “corporate citizen”. Instead of creating the public interest the

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public relations person's role is to search for and find the existing public interest of the citizens with which to align the activities of their organisation" (Christensen, et al, 2014, p. 141).

One way to mitigate this risk might be for a company's leaders, and especially the Chief Executive Officer, to ground their leadership in their own humanity (Barton et al, 2019):

"Today's executives also need to showcase humanity by intertwining their personal values and stories into a corporate context" (Hewitt, 2020). In his book *Values: Building a Better World for All* (2022), former Governor of the Bank of Canada and the Bank of England Mark Carney makes the case for corporate purpose as a foundation for stakeholder capitalism but notes that empathetic leadership is supported but requires a plan beyond the C-Suite (May, 2021, p.17).

Employee pro-social motivation

The purpose-driven corporation invariably brings another advantageous dimension: social purpose is an effective recruitment tool. Employees want to work for companies where they feel they contribute meaningfully to something greater than profit (Glavas & Piderit, 2019; Peterson, 2004; Alonso-Almeida, 2018; Smith, 2016; Resh et al, 2017), and this is especially true for prosocial individuals. Highly prosocial employees are identified when "the need to have a positive social impact on the lives of others is very strong, so whether or not work provides opportunities to do so is especially relevant for how meaningful work is" (Smith, 2016, p.629). Millennials and Generation Z, who comprise much of the current and future workforce, are more likely to identify with prosocial values: 83 percent of Millennials tie loyalty to their company's social and environmental action (Cone Communication, 2016). In Canada, employees who felt their employer was highly committed to their community were 1.5 times as likely to intend to stay with the employer (Ayer, 2019). Prosocial employees are particularly drawn to mission-oriented organisations and once there, find increased meaningfulness in aligning their own goals

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to their organisation's. In the competition for talent, corporate citizenship "is the key independent variable that influences employee behaviour such as employee engagement, high-quality relationships, and creative involvement" (Glavas & Piderit, 2019, p.55), each highly prized employee attributes, and a social purpose agenda is particularly attractive in the competition for talent.

Further, once recruited, prosocial employees in purpose-driven organizations are more satisfied and effective (Resh et al, 2017), thus contributing to both profitability and societal benefit. Employees in purpose-driven corporations perform better, "because employees are more likely to understand the firm's strategy" (Henderson, 2020b) and feel a sense of connection to it. The articulation of social responsibility is also a chance for employees to develop a symbiotic relationship with their employer, as "members with strong convictions regarding the social responsibility of businesses would be expected to strongly identify with an organization that stresses good corporate citizenship (Peterson, 2004, p.302), thus leading to increased organisational commitment.

The benefits of attracting and retaining prosocial employees extend beyond effective and aligned execution and employee engagement and retention. Beyond the walls of the workplace, prosocial employees activate their personal communication networks in the community and public spheres, to the benefit or detriment of their employer. Employees serve as megaphones, and act as public ambassadors or critics (Kim & Rhee, 2011, Bowen & Gallicano 2013, Sriramesh et al, 2013), and this role is particularly powerful: "the communication behavior of employees who come in direct contact with external publics is important because publics perceive it to be more neutral compared to sophisticated public relations messages" (Kim & Rhee, 2011, p.244). This is true, particularly with relation to CSR activity: "they also expect

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senior leaders to walk the talk, to set the tone, and to communicate about CSR endeavours”

(Bowen & Gallicano, 2013, p.198). The likelihood of employees sharing positive information about their organisation’s strengths and accomplishments, or “positive megaphoning effect”, is directly tied to Reflective Ethical Symmetry (Bowen & Gallicano 2013). Employees, holding high expectations of their employer’s social responsibility commitments, can serve as their employers’ most effective and trustworthy ambassadors or conversely, as their most potent critics when trust is diminished and employees feel an asymmetry in the relationship. “The audience that will be most skeptical about a company’s purpose will always be its own employees, which is why it is critical in creating a master purpose narrative to start with them” (Hirsch, 2016, p.50). With easy access to social media, including sites such as LinkedIn and Glass Door, employees’ perceptions and feelings of their employer can become both an internal and external point of leverage or liability. When the cycle is virtuous, prosocial individuals choose companies with social purpose, and then build the type of affinity with their employer which allows them to “become a visible carrier for these employees’ identity and reputation.” (Henderson & Van den Steen, 2015, p.329).

In the execution of a social purpose mandate, employees look to their managers for authenticity and for evidence of a commitment to embed purpose throughout the organization: “the link between purpose and profitability is present only if senior management has been successful in infusing that sense of purpose further down in the organization, especially in middle management, and in providing strategic clarity throughout the organization on how to achieve that purpose” (Gartenberg & Serafeim, 2019). Studies point to a lack of CSR leadership as the primary barrier to the successful implementation of CSR: “participants see a link between the company’s lack of CSR leadership, the lack of organizational support, and the

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general negative attitude toward CSR within the company” (Latapí Agudelo et al, 2019). As the workplace continues to take a central role in the social fabric of our society and as individuals turn to the business sector as a catalyst for solutions to seemingly intractable problems, employees are no longer satisfied with an employee-employer relationship based solely on a paycheck. Rather, they seek a personal connection to their work, and need to feel they are contributing to a larger goal:

Although achieving acceptable financial objectives is clearly important for a company’s survival, a target ROI will rarely galvanize an organization into action. If people are to put out their extraordinary effort required to realize company targets they must be able to identify with them. As one disaffected manager said, ‘It’s fine to emphasize what we must shoot for but we also need to know what we stand for.’ (Bartlett & Goshal, 1994, p.84)

Purpose-driven leadership

In a society and political environment often marked by deadlock (Edelman, 2022), the public increasingly expects that the power and influence of market capitalism provide a way through some of our most entrenched problems: “The heightened expectations of business bring CEOs new demands to focus on societal engagement with the same rigor, thoughtfulness, and energy used to deliver on profits” (Glenday, 2019). Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, 64 percent of people felt that business leaders should lead change rather than wait for government intervention (Edelman, 2018). In Canada, that expectation is even more pronounced, with 80 percent of Canadians agreeing with the aforementioned statement and 89 percent of Canadians believing that their employers’ CEO should speak out on issues (Edelman, 2020). Most CEOs accept the role bestowed upon them; in one study conducted before the pandemic, 93 percent of leaders believe that business should have a positive impact on society beyond pursuing profit (YPO, 2019). In another study, 90 percent agreed that corporations are responsible to

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shareholders and stakeholders alike, and prioritized income inequality, climate change, and gender parity as their issues to solve (GLG, 2020).

When the C-suite serves as the north star for ESG, social innovation, or broad multi-stakeholder initiatives, those initiatives instantly have more credibility and a greater chance at success (Maak et al, 2016, Polizzotto, 2019, Serafiem, 2020). Research on the micro foundation of Corporate Social Responsibility, namely the impact of a corporation's leader on corporate citizenship, is limited but deductions can be made from the Upper Echelon Theory, which posits that organizations are effectively a reflection of their top executives, that organizational behavior and outcomes are affected by their leader's personalities, experiences and values, and that CEOs operate at the boundary between the firm and the external environment. (Hambrick, 2007; Hambrick and Mason, 1984). With this framing, the CEO's responsible leadership style, which is grounded in value orientation, influences both the degree to which the corporation engages in CSR activity and how effective it is in doing so (Maak & al, 2016).

Leaders with a more instrumental leadership style drive business with a "strategic focus on business performance" (Maak et al, 2016, 470). They are more task or objective oriented, transactional, competitive, and less interested in business issues that are not core to performance. Consequently, stakeholder relationships tend to be more reactive and dependent on a clear business case. They have a fiduciary orientation, with a more Friedman-esque understanding of their role in the success of the business they lead. This does not imply that their sense of social responsibility is nil, only that it is undertaken where and because it directly supports the business' need to maximize shareholder value. In contrast, integrative responsible leaders lean toward a broader interpretation of value creation. Here, CEOs are networkers and boundary spanners, interacting with a broad range of stakeholders and have a more expansive view of what

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constitutes a legitimate stakeholder. In this way, integrative leaders tend to make prosocial decisions, based on moral reasoning. They have a social welfare orientation and see purpose and profit as more intimately connected. These integrative responsible leaders might well be defined as purpose-driven leaders.

Responsible leadership, and certainly purpose-driven leadership, is grounded in trust and accountability (Maak et al, 2016) and here, an additional, complementary leadership style is also relevant. Servant leadership, with its focus on “the betterment of followers, organizations, and society” (Christensen et al, 2014, p.174) mirrors the ethos of corporate citizenship. Indeed “social responsibility concerns are essentially ‘baked in’ to its theory and practice” (Christensen et al, 2014, p.173). Note that practice is as equally important as theory. Trust demands that words are followed with consistent action: “when the organization acts with ethical responsibility on a consistent basis, it increases its knowability and the expectations of publics are met, thereby building trust between organizations and publics” (Bowen & Gallicano, 2013, p.195).

Whether leadership is a set of learned skills or an innate way of being both skill and mindset are necessary for the effective communication of a purpose mandate or CSR activities (García Sanchez et al, 2019). Here, another key characteristic becomes important. A leader’s motivations for personal involvement in corporate social purpose and a more activist role could stem from a more instrumental, calculated wish for return on investment for the company as much as from a values-driven orientation. Regardless, whether out of affinity toward corporate values, fundamental support for the principle of the purpose-driven company, or a matter of personal conviction, CEO activism is only effective when it is authentic: “To influence public policy, the message has to be authentic to both the individual leader and the business. There

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should be a compelling narrative for why *this* issue matters to *this* CEO of *this* business at *this* time” (Chatterji & Toffel, 2018).

Purpose-driven communication

Corporate social responsibility, public relations, and strategic communications are intrinsically linked. Even the more traditional PR concepts of press agency and publicity (David et al, 2005), are critical to effective CSR: purpose and citizenship may only be effective as much as it is effectively communicated and made known to internal and external publics. Even more so, whether labelled as Corporate Social Responsibility, corporate citizenship, ESG, or corporate social purpose, authentic action has a positive outcome on consumer trust (Swaen & Chumpitaz, 2008), on organizational commitment and employee trust (Farooq et al, 2013), on organizational legitimacy and resilience to exogenous pressures (Zahller, K. et al 2015), and on crisis reputation management (David, 2004). This effect on both internal and external publics makes clear that both functions, namely corporate purpose (however labelled or at whatever stage of evolution) and public relations (or strategic communications management) are interdependent and mutually reinforcing. The stakes are simply too high for silos.

The stalwart principles of Grunig’s Excellence Theory- that humans, societies, and organizations can change for the better through active stakeholder participation and activism and that public relations can support the process (Verčić & Verčić, 2013), continue to serve as the gold standard and are especially relevant for effective purpose-driven communication. The CEO’s position of influence confers special abilities to facilitate communication, collaboration, and alignment (Maak et al, 2016). Effective CEO communication includes a community focus, deploys inclusive language “that evoke collaboration, openness and engagement” in an authentic

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tone that feels more akin to a personal conversation than a speech or presentation and uses trust-building language. It explains rationale and takes ownership of decisions (Beauchamp & O'Connor, 2012). A personal, authentic tone is key. Purpose-driven leadership is grounded in values, and “identifying, communicating, and shaping organizational values is more difficult than articulating a strategic vision because it relies less on analysis and logic and more on emotion and intuition” (Bartlett & Goshal, 1994, p. 84).

Especially in polarized environments and times of social unrest, purpose-driven leadership often compels a CEO to speak out on contentious but important issues. Here, the risks of negative consequences are high, whether public reaction deems that the CEO said the “wrong” thing, said it too late, or said nothing at all. In a time when crises seem to follow each other at a breakneck pace, leaders must triage their responses, lest the impact of their public compassion become diluted. The CEO should carefully consider the appropriateness of their contribution to public dialogue on a specific topic both in terms of personal and corporate relevance. Active support of a professional communications function is especially important in balancing those expectations. Indeed, the progressive corporate communication function seems tailor-made and ready for the challenge of the purpose-driven corporation, with its focus on a triple bottom line (i.e. a multi-stakeholder environment), its discipline of transparent communication, and its focus on reputation management (Bütschi & Steyn, 2006). While the authenticity of timeliness might be compromised, a communications function can anticipate and address any potential backlash in particularly charged environments (Chatterji & Toffel, 2019).

Perhaps the ongoing global pandemic, social unrest, and rise of the purpose-driven corporation present a turning point for public relations in delineating itself from the marketing function. For the purpose-driven corporation, relationships, impact, and reputation are equal

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currency to product or service, and public relations has a strategic role to play in bringing the voice, needs, and expectations of publics into the fabric of the organization, which should in turn “be able to improve the ethics and social responsibility of organizational behaviors (Grunig, 2013) and maintain the organization’s social license to operate. Expectations of transparency rose exponentially with the development of our connected, social media-driven, “digimodern” society, demanding that “an organization can no longer be centered exclusively on self-interests” (Valentini et al, 2012, p.875), but rather recognize that it is part of the social fabric and is responsible to the community in which it operates. If the role of public relations in strategic management is to bring the voices of publics into the decision-making process, public relations should be able to improve the ethics and social responsibility of organizational behaviors: “Progress is not an automatic ride, it is a man-made condition. And at the centre of the condition is communication” (Verčić & Verčić, 2013, p.265).

Purpose-driven corporations- Real-world examples

While there are no formal measures or criteria for purpose-driven companies, many media outlets regularly evaluate and rank the commitment and performance of top corporations. In Canada, Corporate Knights publishes its annual Canada's Best 50 Corporate Citizens, with key indicators including the CEO-average worker pay ratio, racial and gender diversity at board and executive levels, percentage of cash taxes paid, percentage of clean revenue and investments, and carbon productivity. Among the pool of nearly 7,000 Canadian public companies with revenues over \$1B, power generation companies filled the top three spots in 2022, namely Hydro-Quebec, followed Innergex Renewable Energy and Brookfield Renewable Partners. Telecommunications company BCE and forestry company Kruger Products rounded the top five (Heaps, 2022).

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Perhaps the best-known example of purpose-driven leadership in Canada is Michael McCain, CEO of Maple Leaf Foods. Maple Leaf Foods is a global food company and Canada's largest food processor with 14,000 employees, 21 manufacturing facilities, and \$4.5B in sales in 2021 (Maple Leaf Foods, n.d.). It is also the first carbon-neutral food company in the world (Vitello, 2020), with publicly stated accountabilities to reducing food insecurity, to animal care, and to sustainability, among other social commitments (Maple Leaf, n.d.).

Mr McCain regularly takes a public position on business and social issues, speaking from both a personal perspective and as a representative of the company he leads. Further, he set the standard for effective and humane crisis management in Canada and around the world when in 2008 he led the company's response to the death of 23 individuals from food processed at Maple Leaf (Howell & Miller, 2010; Ugoalah, 2015). Mr McCain has called for a re-imagination of capitalism toward shared and equal value stakeholder value, a strong social safety net, and a rejection of "short termism" (McCain, 2022). In an interview on the podcast Chatter that Matters, he further shared his views:

It starts with a belief system. That we are in this for shared value, not shareholder value. And there's an important distinction – shared value recognizes that there are many stakeholders in this business, shareholders are one of them – and an important one. We do care and will care for the enduring value creation of shareholders, like all stakeholders, but the belief system around shared value explicitly rejects the primacy of shareholder value and says our job, and our future, is based on a balanced view of all the stakeholders and our ability to create enduring value for all of those stakeholders in balance, including the environment and protecting the resources that we've been entrusted to in our lives.

Research Problem

As new purpose-driven corporate models emerge, this study examined how and to what extent CEO leadership and communication styles contribute to the success of their companies. It did so by comparing CEO perspectives with employee experience to attempt

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to define purpose-driven leadership, to identify opportunities for deeper alignment between the executive ranks and their larger workforce, and to determine what communications strategies are particularly effective in communicating purpose. Building from emerging literature on the purpose-driven corporation and research on effective leadership and strategic communication, the study sought to articulate a model and roadmap for executives to navigate an increasingly purpose-driven economy with confidence and authenticity.

Research Questions

RQ1 How do CEOs define effective purpose-driven leadership and to what extent do they value purpose-driven leadership?

Many leaders see purpose as a strategic competitive advantage, but definitions of purpose may vary, as might the relative importance of purpose vis-a-vis profit. Here, the study aimed to identify the characteristics of effective purpose-driven leadership and the importance CEOs place in adopting a corporate purpose agenda.

RQ2 Where are the gaps in purpose-driven leadership?

The research answered this question through CEO interviews, but more importantly, through a survey of employees at large. It explored the importance of purpose to employees, employees' experience of their CEO as chief communicator of corporate purpose on measures of relevance, importance, and effectiveness, and finally, how the performance of the CEO in communicating purpose impacts their affinity toward their work and their employer.

RQ3- How and to what extent are leaders making effective use of symmetrical communication in disseminating their corporate purpose agenda?

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The study employed Grunig's theory of symmetrical communication as a framework for exploring the principles of authentic, transparent, and strategic communication and further evaluated the use and impact of two-way communication with publics, including employees, consumers, and other stakeholders.

Methods

This study deployed two methodologies to answer the research questions described above: namely in-depth interviews and an employee survey.

In-depth interviews

A set of in-depth interviews, 30-45 minutes in duration, was conducted with six CEOs, between January 18 and February 9, 2023. Participants needed to be presently serving as the chief executive or equivalent title of a Canadian company. There were no other inclusion or exclusion criteria. The researcher attempted to reach a pool of leaders who consider themselves purpose-driven however by putting out a call to leaders of tech ventures in the Momentum program at MaRS Discovery District. MaRS is an urban tech innovation in Toronto ON with a stated purpose to help innovators create a better world (MaRS Discovery District, n.d.) and the Momentum program supports 80+ ventures, each with alignment to a United Nations Social Development Goal. The invitation to these in-depth interviews made explicit the fact that the research is not affiliated with MaRS, that participation will be kept confidential and anonymized, and that responses would not be shared with MaRS outside of the final report, with special care that leaders would feel no undue pressure or feel otherwise compelled to participate outside of their personal interest.

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Though employed by MaRS, the researcher had no access to or influence over the list of prospective interview participants at any point during the research. Initial contact with prospective interview participants was made by Executives in Residence at MaRS Discovery District, by email invitation on December 2, 2022, with reminders sent on January 20, 2023, by the MaRS Senior Vice President of Venture Services. Interested participants were then connected to the researcher by an Executive in Residence, the Senior Vice President, or initiated contact with the researcher directly.

The interviews employed a discovery-oriented approach to better understand the participant's experiences and feelings on the topic, with special attention placed on word use and the extensiveness and intensity of the responses. Interview data were aggregated and analysed via thematic analysis. See Appendix A to view the in-depth interview questionnaire.

Employee survey

Second, an online survey was launched through snowball sampling via the researcher's personal LinkedIn (885 followers) and Facebook (465 friends) accounts, with a call to action to share the survey among peers. The survey was launched on November 20, 2022, and closed on December 18, 2022, with reminders sent intermittently over the four-week period. See Appendix B to view the survey questions. The purpose of the survey was to determine general employee sentiment around corporate purpose, the role and effectiveness of the CEO in communicating purpose, and the impact of purpose on their personal affinity to their employer. The researcher aimed to gain insights into general trends and sentiment around purpose against which CEO sentiment and action would be compared, rather than measuring the effectiveness of each

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interviewed CEO by surveying their own employees. Survey participants needed to be currently employed in a part-time or full-time capacity for any Canadian for-profit company. There were no other inclusion or exclusion criteria. Survey results were analysed through descriptive statistical analysis. Regression analysis, factor analysis, cluster analysis or other forms of analyses were deployed to better understand the data.

Results

Survey Results

Of the 127 respondents, the majority were either born between 1960-1980 (43%, n=55), commonly known as Gen X, or between 1981 and 1996, or Millennials (40%, n=51). As such results can be seen as reflective of these two generations rather than of the general working population. Results for the Baby Boomer or Gen Z generations were not statistically significant and not reported. Similarly, most respondents had been in the workforce for 10+ years, with almost half (49%, n=62) of respondents reporting 20+ years of work, and 35% reporting 10-19 years of work (n=44). Results by years in the workforce were also not reported. Level of seniority is slightly more varied across the pool of respondents: almost half, or 49% are directors or executives (n=62), 32% (n=41) described themselves in manager or specialist roles, and 10% (n=13) perform associate or coordinator roles. 59% (n=75) of respondents reported managing others as part of their role, and 33% (n=42) reported working as individual contributors. See Appendix C: Survey respondents by demographic for a full breakdown of respondents.

In-depth Interview Results

A total of six interviews were conducted between January 18, 2023, and February 9, 2023. All respondents served as Chief Executive Officers of Canadian technology or tech-adjacent companies and were connected to MaRS Discovery District through the Venture

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Services offering. Companies were at various stages of growth, but generally at the scaleup stage, located across the Greater Toronto Area, and covered a diversity of fields, including health innovation, cleantech, and software as a service.

RQ1 How do CEOs define effective purpose-driven leadership and to what extent do they value purpose-driven leadership?

In-depth interview results

Every respondent felt that purpose played a significant part in how they ran their organizations, calling it “the one part underlying the entire strategic plan”, the “unifying vision for the organization and a rallying cry from a culture perspective” or simply the “oxygen” of the organization. Stated one respondent: “I think it underpins everything we do, every decision that we make. It’s who we are. It’s our brand ethos. It drives ethics; however you want to define it. It’s woven into our products, our customer service, the way we hire, the way we treat our employees, [and] our customers”. For some respondents, social purpose was the primary impetus for founding the company, with the product or the service itself serving as an articulation of that purpose. One respondent commented that their business “was built as a purpose-built company and it has been that way since day one” and another stated: “A big part of the motivation of founding the company was all of my experience working the front lines of the healthcare system, seeing how hard it was for people to access health care and seeing how unpleasant the experience of accessing health care was for most people”.

When asked to articulate how purpose was important to their company’s success, respondents pointed to their stated purpose serving as a tool for alignment with external stakeholders in the access and cost of capital, both in terms of sharing a compelling narrative

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but also in filtering potentially misaligned investors: “We did have our investors sign up a pledge as part of our Series A around [our] values. It was built into the fundraising documents, so that we could ensure that they were not going to be surprised down the road if we made decisions based on those values, and they were quite happy to do it”. Purpose also reinforces the relationship with customers: “by doing the right thing there was this groundswell, customers were just so touched that we would do the right thing and stand by it”. One respondent spoke of purpose as the north star for balancing customer impact and profit maximization:

somewhere deep down there is a balance of being purpose-driven but also having some degree of social construct and values that say, we could charge an immense amount and make an immense profit for the business because it meets such a critical need but we’re not going to do this because we also recognize that on some level, we damage our purpose by limiting it by having extraordinary price points.

Most respondents mentioned the role of purpose as a tool for innovation in product and service design and delivery:

If you are guided by purpose first and foremost you are going to continue to build the right things and provide the right services and have the right team members who care about that purpose, and you are going to deliver services in a great way because everyone on your team believes in what you are achieving with those services. If you do all of those things inevitably profit will come.

Most consistently however were respondents’ thoughts on the importance of purpose for talent acquisition and retention: “It’s very important particularly for newer generations, but it’s important for other folks as well that the organization be standing for something positive”. Respondents also spoke of the effect of aligning talent to the company’s purpose from a culture perspective: “I get to work with people who love their jobs and who are passionate about what we are doing, and we all support each other, which is a huge personal

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benefit”. All respondents acknowledged a clear line between purpose-driven staff and the company’s success, one describing it as a “flywheel effect”:

If we invest in our people and in building a culture and environment in which they can do the best work of their careers, then they will produce incredible outcomes for our clients and customers and then our clients and customers will be very happy with the work and will be happy to spend more with us to continue to have us do it, which gives us more revenue which allows us to invest more in the people in the culture, and the flywheel continues from there.

Another respondent echoed: “if we can create a world where you can self-actualize [staff], then your business can self-actualize. Your customers can self-actualize, your partners can self-actualize, the next generation of future employees will join the company”. For one respondent, talent was tied not only to a successful company but to a successful society and economy, articulating a link between the purpose-driven corporation and social impact:

It’s not about ‘how do I cut costs and become profitable?’. No. How do I ensure that I’m getting the most out of people and that they are best supported so that we are not wasting money on misalignment between people and roles, we’re not wasting money on turnover. The outcome, if we do this right, is massive returns, a thriving economic ecosystem, solving world problems better, because we are utilizing the entire workforce’s potential.

All respondents felt a deep personal connection to their company’s social purpose and almost necessarily so: “my personal core values absolutely live inside the company...when you found something like that, your DNA becomes part of the culture whether you intend it to or not. It just sort of naturally happens.” Another respondent further stated: “the values of an organization, the people of an organization, the way that the organization operates are almost universally a reflection of the values of the CEO that started the company.” When reflecting on their evolution as a purpose-driven leader, most respondents spoke of a progression from holding a deep sense of personal values to being able to better express and live them in a

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professional context. Said one respondent: “if I think back to how I ran the first company that I started ... we didn't have [our purpose] quite as articulated, and as developed a framework.

But I think it still would've been a very similar set of things”. A second respondent noted:

“my personal purpose has always been something that I have been passionate about in one way or another. I don't think I ever would have articulated it in that way, actually, until the pandemic”. Some respondents spoke of a purpose journey more as an evolution of practice: “one thing that has evolved, it's not a values thing, it's more of a management thing”.

Respondents spoke of a commitment to continuous learning, as environments change and their businesses evolve: “I learn all the time because I am changing as a person, but the company is changing, the team is changing, the size of the company is changing”. Another respondent echoed: “leading a 100-person company is different than leading a 50-person company, which is different than leading a 1000-person company. And what is expected of you as the leader changes as your team changes”.

Two respondents did speak of a more fundamental shift as purpose-driven leaders. One spoke of a break from an earlier career track in favour of entrepreneurship to better align their work to their values: “I was at odds with my personal values when I worked in investment banking and private equity”. This CEO spoke of defining a new leadership style for herself, one she calls “maternal leadership”: “Having that empathy, purpose lens that yes, we need to profit as a corporation, but it's important that all of our stakeholders feel respected and have a safe place where they can grow”. The second respondent spoke of a fundamental change in leadership style to better align with personal values, forging her own way toward a more purpose-driven, people-centric ethos:

I had to work twice as hard as everybody else. I [had to] prove myself by working harder and mirroring what working harder for my male examples looked like. I didn't

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have somebody that showed me leading from a place of love and care versus with a stick.

Survey results

63% of survey respondents describe their company as purpose driven. Those most likely to do so held positions of higher seniority, either as managers (33%) or as directors or executives (57%) and were more likely to manage people (66%). People who believe their employer is a purpose-driven company are more likely to feel that purpose is important to a company's success, 73% assigned it a rating of 6 or 7 out of 7, and to feel that it is personally important to them, with 83% rating the measure a 6 or 7 out of 7.

Table 1*Employee feelings about the role of purpose*

	Company is purpose-driven (n=77)	Company is not purpose-driven/DK (n=45)
Purpose is important to a company's success		
Rating of one or two	0%	16%
Rating of three, four or five	27%	51%
Rating of six or seven	73%	31%
Don't know		2%
Purpose is personally important		
Rating of one or two	0%	7%
Rating of three, four or five	17%	40%
Rating of six or seven	83%	53%

Note: Ratings on a scale of 1-7, where 1 is not at all important and 7 is extremely important.

When asked to rate the importance of purpose to a company's overall success, respondents overall assigned a 5.6 rating out of 7, with 57% rating purpose as very important, with a rating of 6 or 7. Only 5% of respondents felt that purpose was not important to a company's success, reflected by a rating of 1 or 2 out of 7. Those most likely to assign a rating of

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6 or 7 on this measure worked at the director/executive (53%) or manager (32%) levels and were also more likely to manage teams (63%).

RQ2 Where are the gaps in purpose-driven leadership?

Interview results

Some of the respondents felt that all activity should cascade from purpose, and that purpose should be integrated with all of their activities including financial performance, vision and strategy, crisis management, and leading people: “it’s interwoven into everything we do”. Many noted the increased efficiency and effectiveness resulting from that interconnectedness: “We don’t carve purpose out and think ‘what are we doing for purpose and how do we make sure we are doing that.’ It is inherent in that we have such a structured framework around culture that we wouldn’t do anything that doesn’t meet that”.

Others prioritized purpose and felt it integral to their company, but were careful to still highlight the importance of keeping a close eye on performance:

Our mantra internally from a sustainability perspective is actually performance first and sustainability second. Because if you don’t have the performance piece, you are not going to drive adoption and you’re not going to have the impact that you are expecting to have organizationally.

and the importance of maintaining profitability:

While we are very focused in terms of purpose and what we are trying to achieve, nothing in purpose says to do it efficiently or do it in a way that allows us to pay our bills. It is really critical that part of my job is to say ‘this is the purpose, this is what we have to do’, but another part of my job is to say ‘we have to do it responsibly’.

Indeed, half of the interviewed CEOs noted the importance of their personal involvement with sales, growth and profitability: “we’re at a young enough stage that I am critical to helping move

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the needle with sales, that's what allows us to keep the lights on and that's what's allowing us to get our next round of funding”.

All respondents spoke of the critical role of leading people: “It’s about setting that vision, strategy, and then making sure that you are aligning people to that, so they are one and the same”. They also spoke of the catalytic impact that values-aligned employees have on their organization: “My number one job across all of those is to bring on board the right people...One of our number one advantages in our company is how purpose-driven our team is, how much they believe in what we are doing”.

In discussing challenges to leading with purpose, some respondents spoke of the need to constantly ensure alignment between the organization’s common goal and employees’ own purpose-driven values, where priorities might differ. Some spoke of creating alignment where purpose was less important to employees than it might be to the organization: “there are people who are still old-school, you have to constantly tie it back to how the business will benefit from it. Sometimes by being so much about doing good in the world and being altruistic, sometimes people stop listening. Those that aren’t there don’t get it yet”, or where the link between an employee’s day-to-day doesn’t feel directly linked to the organization’s larger purpose: “there is a disconnect that can occur between what [the company] is working on right now. They are looking at this purpose and they are going: I don’t understand how what I do is impacting that purpose”.

Some respondents spoke of the challenge of efficacy in communicating around complex topics, particularly for early-stage tech companies where global macroeconomic conditions can affect the bottom line in a very real way and where the funding mechanisms for venture-backed companies are not always well understood. When communicating through a challenging period

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for the company, one respondent noted: “Even in an organization like ours that leans so heavily into this, we got the communication a little wrong, but we also create a safe environment for getting it wrong”. Complex or hybrid environments also present their own challenges: “messaging internally can be challenging when everybody hears different stories at different times through different channels though different people because we’re apart”.

While clarity of purpose was largely seen by respondents as an asset when working with external stakeholders of all types, the extent, utility, and enthusiasm for purpose-driven messaging outside of the organization varied. Some respondents noted that purpose can narrow the field with investors: “because our purpose is really clear, who we are as a company, there are investors who will just say ‘nope, not interested’”, as well as with customers: “also [we need to be] okay with the fact that maybe we’re better suited for a smaller portion of the population. That’s okay. That will grow over time”. Another respondent, whose company can be described as disruptive within its industry, mentioned the importance of concise and consistent messaging: “There are channels that are out of our control, where your words can get twisted, things that you did not say are kind of paraphrased, using snippets of things that you said”.

Survey results

The average rating for the performance of respondents’ company on purpose was 5.5, with 54% rating it 6-7, and only 3% giving their company a poor (1 or 2) rating. Again, those most likely to regard their company’s performance positively held directorship or executive roles (68%) and led people (73%).

Table 2

Employee ratings of their company’s performance on purpose

Level of Authority	Level of Seniority
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	(n=117)		(n=74)		
	Total Respondents (n=117)	People Leaders (n=75)	Individual Contributors (n=42)	Director or above (n=44)	Manager or below (n=29)
Rating of one-two	2%	0%	5%	0%	7%
Rating of three-five	26%	29%	21%	36%	48%
Rating of six-seven	34%	39%	26%	61%	45%
Don't know/no answer	38%	32%	48%	2%	0%

Note: Ratings on a scale of 1-7, where 1 is not at all well and 7 is extremely well.

High ratings were also correlated to respondents' personal views on purpose. 90% of those who felt that purpose was important to a company's success gave their employer a 6-7 rating on purpose, and 88% of those for whom purpose is personally important rated their company as 6 or 7 on performance. Of the 42% who felt that their company had a fair performance (rating of 3, 4, or 5), just over half, or 52% of respondents felt it was important to a company's success and almost three-quarters (74%) felt it personally important to them.

Where 72% of respondents gave a 6 or 7 rating (n=89) when asked to rate how personally important purpose is, most likely to share this rating were respondents at higher levels of seniority, serving as managers or directors/executives (85%, n=76) and leading other employees (63%, n=56). Those for whom purpose was personally important were more likely to believe that purpose was important to a company's success (70%, compared to 57% of respondents overall) though 27% felt only moderately so, assigning a rating of 3-5 on the measure. 72% of people who described purpose as extremely important (6-7 rating) described their company as purpose-driven, versus 63% of respondents overall. Where 54% of respondents overall gave their

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company a rating of 6 or 7 on their performance as a purpose-driven company, purpose-driven employees were more discerning, with 39% giving their company the same 6 or 7 rating.

Table 3

Influence of personal sense of purpose on employee ratings of their company's performance on purpose

	Total respondents (n=117)	Highly purpose-driven (n=89)	Moderately purpose-driven (n=32)	Not purpose- driven/no answer (n=6)
Rating of one-two	2%	2%	0%	
Rating of three-five	26%	26%	25%	
Rating of six-seven	34%	40%	13%	
Don't know/no answer	38%	31%	63%	100%

Note: Highly purpose-driven denotes a rating of 6-7, moderately purpose-driven denotes a rating of 3-5, not purpose-driven denotes a rating of 1-2

Note: Ratings on a scale of 1-7, where 1 is not at all well and 7 is extremely well

RQ3- How and to what extent are leaders making effective use of symmetrical communication in disseminating their corporate purpose agenda?

Interview Results

When it came to communicating a purpose agenda to staff, some respondents felt fully responsible for disseminating the company's purpose mandate. Said one respondent: "I consider myself the main person that owns it and is responsible for ensuring that the organization lives it", and another echoed: "I'm the founder and the CEO of the company, and I'm like the Chief Purpose Officer". One respondent hesitated to assign ownership of messaging at all: "For any individual to own the messaging to me would say that this isn't messaging that authentically everybody believes in". There was consensus among respondents that while purpose may come from the top, it needs many voices to be

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effectively disseminated, either through their leadership team, a Chief Experience Officer or working with an external resource to hone a compelling purpose statement for the organization: “I am leading the charge in terms of starting that communication and then they continue to cascade that down into the rest of the organization. As we switch from strategy into planning, setting it up company goals and department goals, that really trickles down.” In communicating purpose-driven messaging, CEOs reported using tools and tactics such as embedding purpose messaging into all-hands meetings and weekly team meetings, featuring purpose statements on strategy roadmaps and other key documents, and disseminating purpose-driven messages through online messaging platforms.

Responses varied in whether and how companies leveraged purpose with external stakeholders. Some saw it as a tool for building legitimacy and authenticity with customers:

Sometimes you see in companies that are in spaces like ours, they have a very different message when they are talking to the media or to an investor or at conferences than they do to their customers. And I think their customers typically know that and can feel that, and it hurts them from an adoption perspective. In our case, our purpose is something that we can confidently talk about with all of those audiences.

Others however felt it largely irrelevant to this stakeholder group: “It doesn’t really come up that much in those conversations, from the buying journey or something like that. No one ever really asks. We don’t hide anything about it but it’s not really what closes the deal or brings on new customers”. Generally, respondents felt that aside from defining the purpose mandate writ large, messaging to customers was owned and driven by the marketing team, and sometimes legal counsel. Some CEOs did directly participate in purpose messaging with the general public, through activities such as podcast appearances, speaking engagements,

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thought leadership, hosting symposia and other events, donating products for charitable purposes, and engaging with media.

When asked whether the CEO's role should be evangelizing the company's purpose, some acknowledged that it may not always be so for other types of companies, either because the organization largely operates without a noticeable public presence, because the CEO is restricted by a different type of ownership structure, because the industry or product doesn't resonate as purpose-driven, or because the CEO would prefer for another member of their team to drive purpose messaging. Others felt strongly that the CEO should always serve as chief evangelist: "100%. That's their job. Period. If they are not leading by example, it's never going to happen". One respondent further noted:

The CEO only has three jobs. The CEO's jobs are: make sure you have money in the bank, make sure you're hiring the right people, which means hiring people that are going to believe in and execute on the company's purpose and vision, and set the overall company strategy and direction, and that is literally all in my opinion the CEO should do. So that third one, and that second one both have to have the company's purpose built into that.

Regardless of their thoughts on the general appropriateness of the CEO as a purpose evangelist, all felt a personal call to serve as one. Some felt it important as a part of inspiring and attracting talent: "Expressing that vision and purpose- because it's very important for people who are selecting a role and a job to come to, those sorts of things are critical- I think it's a big part of what I need to do". Others felt it important that they leverage their position as purpose-driven CEOs to mitigate risk and address public misconceptions:

In an environment like ours, a service that we provide, it is critical for me to be out in front of the market, evangelizing what we do, explaining what we do, taking on the criticism and pushing back on it. Because if we don't do that what ends up happening is that there won't be awareness, people won't know how to access our service. Those that are in entrenched systems [who] would like to see you fail, it's a lot easier for them to see you fail if you don't fight back.

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Tied to a personal calling was a clear sense of the importance of authenticity, and most respondents spoke of this quality as integral to any type of messaging:

with anything, if you say one thing and do something else, you're going to lose all credibility. So, it has to be authentic...Figure out what that is that is authentic that maps back to what is going to make an employee jump out of bed in the morning. What is going to make a customer be loyal and stick with you no matter what.

Survey Results

When asked to rate the importance that a CEO is purpose-driven, respondents assigned a higher rating overall (6.2) than their rating of the importance that a company is purpose-driven (5.6). Those in mid-level positions of seniority assigned a higher average rating: with managers assigning an average rating of 6.6 and specialists 6.5, with directors and executives an average rating of 6.0 and associate and coordinators a rating of 5.8. Team leaders assigned a slightly higher average rating than did individual contributors (6.1 vs 5.7) on the measure of the importance that a CEO is purpose-driven.

Of those who felt strongly that the CEO should be purpose-driven (rating of 6-7, n=92), 42% assigned a rating of 6-7 on the performance of the company as purpose-driven, with 32% giving a more modest rating of the company's performance on purpose (n=29). Those who were less convinced that the CEO should be purpose-driven (n=23), ratings on the company's performance were significantly lower, with only 9% (n=2) awarding a rating of 6 or 7.

Table 4

Influence of employees' expectations of the role of CEO as purpose-driven on the perceived performance of their company's performance on purpose

Total respondents (n=117)	Strongly feel CEO should be purpose-driven (n=92)	Moderately/do not feel CEO should be purpose- driven (n=26)

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Rating of one-two	2%	2%	0%
Rating of three-five	26%	32%	8%
Rating of six-seven	34%	42%	4%
Don't know/no answer	38%	24%	88%

Note: Ratings on a scale of 1-7, where 1 is not at all effective and 7 is extremely effective.

The vast majority, 75%, of respondents choose their CEO as their preferred communicator of purpose (n=89). Corporate Social Responsibility or impact leaders are second in preference, but still collected only 10% of responses (n=12). The CEO was also seen as the most trustworthy and authentic communicator of purpose, garnering 42% responses (n=50), though corporate social responsibility or impact leaders also hold trust and authenticity, with 18% (n=21) of respondents viewing them as the most trustworthy and authentic, followed by respondents' own managers, with 14% (n=17) of responses.

Table 5

Preferred and most trustworthy and authentic communicator of purpose

	Preferred Communicator (n=118)	Most trustworthy / authentic communicator (n=118)
CEO	75%	42%
Corporate Social Responsibility/Impact	10%	18%
Human Resources	2%	5%
Manager	3%	14%
Other	8%	8%
None	-	2%
Don't know	2%	10%

Respondents who identified the CEO as the most trustworthy and authentic communicator of purpose, were somewhat more likely to describe their company as purpose-

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driven: 70% (n=35) versus 63%. They were also significantly more likely to assign a strong performance rating of 6-7: 88% versus 54%.

The 16% of respondents who felt that purpose was personally important but who did not describe their company as purpose-driven (n=14), preferred that their CEO be the primary communicator of purpose as much as general respondents (71% vs 75%) but were less likely than respondents overall to identify their CEO as the most trustworthy or authentic communicator of purpose (29% vs. 42%). Similarly, respondents for whom purpose was personally important (rating 6-7) but rated their company's performance on purpose as fair to poor (n=24), preferred their CEO to be the primary communicator on purpose (75%), but were less likely to view their CEO as the most trustworthy and authentic communicator of purpose (33%).

Discussion

Several themes emerged in the interviews and in the survey results and while samples were too limited to draw firm conclusions, they do point to interesting directional insights. Some of these insights reflect existing literature, and others point to the opportunity for further investigation.

Purpose as a personal expression

Authenticity- of purpose and of approach- was a strong theme for each of the CEOs, and their role as founder and CEO was intrinsically tied to their own personal sense of mission:

My wife always used to joke about my beauty pageant speech...in my view, when you are fortunate enough to be born in Canada in this time and place, we are some of the absolute luckiest human beings that have ever lived. That's true for folks that have come to Canada [too]. We are just so incredibly fortunate. And my view has always been that we owe it to the folks that weren't as fortunate to do something to help the next generation [so that] that continue to be true for them.

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Respondents spoke about how social purpose was critical to how they define themselves and how they choose to show up as leaders: “Your personal values really are reflected a ton, in terms of how you manage, how you grow an organization, the kinds of people that you are attracted to hire”. They also spoke of their purpose both in terms of having an impact on the people they lead and on the sectors they serve, but also as a deep expression of who they are as people: “The confluence of those two events happening [becoming a parent and launching a business] at the same time really had me reflect that in my leadership role as a CEO. In many ways I do take a maternal view and lens”. This can feel tremendously motivating, but also sometimes like a big responsibility: “I worry about us just not being able to live up to the perfection utopia that we are striving for. It’s hard. I don’t want to let anybody down”.

One leader, who owns an e-tailing business spoke of a specific incident where her sense of social purpose guided her decisions. She reported receiving weekly calls from vendors encouraging her to add an option for customers to buy products now and pay in installments over the course of a longer period, an increasingly common practice in online retail, and one generating warnings from consumer advocates because of high fees and interest rates. Though these options have been shown to increase conversion and profits, this CEO steadfastly refuses to implement it, as she feels it is predatory and harmful to society.

That credit is doing all kinds of things to vulnerable members of our community. Every time I have that conversation with a sales rep, they are so shocked because they’ve never heard a CEO say that...It’s an easy sell for them. And I say sure, it might increase conversion, it might improve the bottom line but what harm are we doing to society. I just don’t feel comfortable with it.

While a powerful example of balancing purpose and profit, the CEO does not make this story well known to her staff and partners. To her, it is just another example of how she runs her business. To her, there are countless stories like it. Another CEO spoke of the risk of

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inauthenticity and the importance of an unwavering commitment to the company's social purpose:

Do you, at the DNA level, believe it? Do you understand it, have you become one with it? Because if you can't do that, everyone else will see through someone just being a talking head. You have to believe it, and you have to be willing to defend it, even when it's not popular, when it's financially not rewarding.

The survey results suggest that this type of personal approach to purpose would resonate with employees, given respondents' significant preference for the CEO to serve as the chief communicator of purpose (75% preferred the CEO over other functions or leaders) and the correlation between the CEO's perceived authenticity and the company's perceived performance on purpose (88% vs. 54% performance ratings of 6-7 when the CEO is perceived as the most trustworthy and authentic communicator of purpose vs. not the most trustworthy or authentic).

These findings reflect current research on the importance that employees place on their leaders' personal set of values and its authentic expression, including the Upper Echelon Theory's view of the mirrored nature of a chief executive and the company they lead, as well as the concept of servant leadership, with its deep commitment to the overall betterment of stakeholders.

The CEO as chief employee motivator

Perhaps the most compelling business case for purpose, aside from a sense of personal mission, is the impact on talent recruitment and engagement. 72% of employees surveyed felt that purpose was very important to them, and purpose was described as an essential part of the employee value proposition for every CEO interviewed. Purpose is a talent attractor: "people generally don't want to just work, or at least, the kind of passionate people we want to attract, don't want to just work for a company that makes a widget, or has no real soul as a business". For some, the employee experience is pro forma: "Business exists to support people... people are

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at the center of everything. And purpose-driven leadership starts with how [you are] putting those humans first and serving those humans both in your leadership style but also in the mission of the business”. Echoes another respondent: “how the [staff] manifest during their journey and time at [our company] is the most important thing to me. If that journey is allowing them to become the best version of themselves, then everything else will take care of itself”.

In addition to talent attractor and culture builder, purpose is seen by the CEOs interviewed as a strategic effort with a direct impact on the bottom line:

I think that may be the easiest way to think of ROI in that regard is if you have a discretionary percentage of people’s time that they will give to their employer above and beyond their sort of minimum job requirement- maybe it 10%, maybe it's 20%- that discretionary time unlocks when they're passionate about what they're doing and they believe that they're part of a larger organization and have a shared purpose with it. So even if we get out of our team, purely from an economic perspective that additional discretionary effort that they might not have otherwise spent, it is well worth it.

Another CEO spoke of their staff as “the most important intellectual property within a company, the most important asset” for an emerging new business model that is “decentralizing and empowering individuals and that exchange of value between different people”. To this CEO, a purpose-driven leadership model is a means of future-proofing the company: “to me purpose-driven leadership is the next evolution. Yes, you can do it the old ways, but ultimately companies that are going to be the most successful, in time, will be led this way”.

Survey results show that the higher in seniority and level of authority, the more committed employees are to the purpose agenda, in terms of personal importance, importance to their employer’s success, and the company’s perceived performance on purpose. This points to the importance of ensuring that purpose is communicated through the ranks and that every employee can map a direct path from their day-to-day to the company’s larger purpose, in order to maximize its potential impact.

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These findings directly reflect the research on pro-social employees, those highly prized team members who are particularly drawn to purpose-driven companies, and once there, find more meaning in their work, tend to be more effective, and further, serve as powerful megaphones for their employers, further disseminating the company's reputation as a purpose-driven employer. Notes one CEO: "We have a very low voluntary attrition rate. We have great ability to attract new people to come and work in our business. It's reflected in things like our Glass Door score, which today sits at about 4.9 across 50-something reviews".

Disruption with purpose

Two of the six CEOs interviewed were leading companies with products that were essentially disruptive to the dominant system or the industry in which they operate, one in accessibility in health care and one in precision chemistry in agriculture. In these cases, purpose messaging seemed a particularly potent tool for stakeholder management. These CEOs spoke of the passion and commitment of their staff, who essentially function as changemakers by virtue of executing the company's purpose: "We are a pesticide company. So the fact that we can recruit people that are committed to sustainability because we can talk about how we are making pesticides more effective, how we are helping growers do more with less, that's really important from a talent retention perspective". This CEO also felt that purpose messaging supports customer acquisition: "I'm incredibly excited to do this in the context of my purpose, because it helps build social license for new technologies in agriculture". The second CEO echoed the sentiment: "for what we do, we're trying to make healthcare more accessible, and if no one knows we are there, then no one can come to us, and our purpose is not really achieved". Purpose is also an effective shield against would-be critics, serving to demystify motivations and highlight the goal of doing good and making systems better rather than profiting from a broken

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one: “The other thing is that we are fighting a very entrenched system, the way that healthcare is provided in Canada is so entrenched it’s almost religious. Typically, what you will find is anytime you are fighting entrenched systems there’s a lot of people who will attack you and try to push back on what you do”. While there is not enough data to make a firm pronouncement, it certainly appears that authentic social purpose is an effective tool for leaders in disruptive industries, granting the company pathways to social license with customers, regulators, employees, and the general public alike. This would in fact reflect research on the importance of purpose messaging as a shield from external pressures and a tool in times of crisis as well as a means of solidifying social license.

Purposeful what, purposeful how

Four of the six CEOs interviewed led companies whose products or services were the clearest articulation of their social purpose mandate. This facilitated purpose messaging, one simply needs to talk about the product to feel the importance of the company’s purpose mandate: “when I look at what we do, our purpose is so directly connected to what everybody is doing. People get it, they really feel the connection of what they do on a daily basis and what we set out to achieve as a company”. But a purposeful offering need not be the sole pathway to a purpose-driven company. Indeed, how a business is run is just as important as what a business does, and in some cases, the “what” becomes largely irrelevant. Purpose-driven leaders in more conventional industries, like e-retail or software-as-a-service, ground their purpose mandate in their people, ensuring that staff experience a workplace that is meaningful, and that their well-being is prioritized. Says one respondent: “We have really invested significant energy, time, and thought, and those sorts of things, in how we make people our purpose so that for them this is much more than just a 9-to-5 job”.

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Here, however, the warning seems to be to not push social purpose too far beyond what is authentic and meaningful to employees. Says one respondent:

You'll see banks who say our purpose is to make life better for Canadians, or something like that. And in the end, the way you're making life better is because you are helping them to manage their finances, and you the person on the team is really adding some zeros on their statement... You're so disconnected from making their life better. You're a cog in a bigger machine.

Though the leaders of this theoretical bank may well take issue with the framing, the larger point seems to be the importance of authenticity in intention and backing up those intentions with meaningful, concrete commitments to running a business such that it makes the world a better place for employees at all levels and in all roles. One respondent made this commitment clear:

drawing the line between today, tomorrow, next week, and next month and how that actually is connected to this purpose is very important. Otherwise, purposes by their nature, are not a straight line, and if you can't help your [staff] connect to it, [they won't see whether] what they are doing has any bearing on it.

Modes of communication where purpose was integrated included "all hands" staff meetings, town halls and regular team meetings, but each CEO also made significant effort to ensure that dialogue was facilitated with employees. This included online communication channels like Slack, anonymous feedback mechanisms, one-on-ones with employees and the promotion of a culture that allows for healthy disagreement and engagement. One CEO went further, setting up a dashboard where every employee can see the financial performance of the company, in an effort to demystify the experience of working in a startup environment. The literature supports this type of informal, personal tone and commitment to transparency as key to building trust with staff and with stakeholders more generally.

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The importance of explicitly demonstrating the link between purpose and front-line staff, and the difficulty in doing so, may provide context for survey results for director/executive level staff, who consistently reported higher ratings across performance measures compared to respondents who identified as managers or associates/coordinators, including and performance of the company on purpose (68% rating of 6-7 vs. 33%), and identifying the CEO as the most trustworthy and authentic communicator of purpose (52% vs 33%) even though they felt virtually the same in terms of the personal importance they placed on purpose (48% vs. 45%) and both indicated strong preference for the CEO as the primary communicator of purpose (80% vs 70%).

An indirect approach to the customer

While research points to customer demand for purpose-driven products, some of the CEOs interviewed had a more pragmatic approach to customer satisfaction. Leaders of purpose-focused products ensured that messaging was clear and consistent around purpose, but those leaders for whom the product itself did not fulfill a social need did not feel compelled to lead conversations with customers or general marketing efforts with a purpose message: “I’m not thinking as practically about how shouting our social mission could actually help improve sales. I should work on that”. Even when the product has a social mission, however, the CEOs interviewed were clear-eyed about the discipline of running a successful business: “it’s really very much focused on the customer and having a real impact on their business, versus something that is more sustainability for sustainability’s sake”. For these CEOs, the commitment to a successfully run business is what launches the virtuous cycle that allows for purpose to thrive. Purpose however does provide clear guard rails for product design, therefore indirectly impacting the customer: “The minute you are guided by profit over purpose, you very quickly

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lose sight of your purpose and the things that you build, those service that you provide quickly become less meaningful to society, they become less meaningful to the people that rely on you, they become less meaningful to the team”.

Here, the role of the communications executive may prove useful. None of the CEOs interviewed spoke of an internal communications function, leaving messaging to external stakeholders to their marketing teams. However, a sophisticated understanding of the stakeholder landscape beyond product fit and salesmanship may help the CEO fully leverage the potent value of purpose with customers as well as other external parties. Certainly, the literature strongly suggests that customers and consumers would much prefer to interact with purpose-driven companies. Perhaps external messaging of purpose is an as-yet unexplored advantage for some of the CEOs interviewed, or perhaps generational shifts impact talent acquisition and retention earlier than customer acquisition and retention. Gen Z may not yet be purchasing agricultural products or HR solutions on behalf of their employers, but as they progress in their careers and increasing grow in tenure and authority, those personal pro-social values may increasingly take precedence in business-to-business and tech industries who may, at least today, be less responsive to purpose-driven trends.

Considerations on gender

Four of the CEOs interviewed were men, and two were women. It is interesting to note the male respondents all spoke of a deep set of enduring values that they have always held and expressed throughout their careers. The women, however, both noted that moving toward purpose-driven leadership required either a clear break from their initial industry or an unlearning of performance expectations that made them successful in traditionally male-

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dominated environments. Both spoke of the experience of returning to more maternal, caretaking instincts as part of their leadership evolution, even literally:

I left my career on Bay Street to become a business owner at the same time as I became a mother... The confluence of those two events happening at the same time really had me reflect that in my leadership role as a CEO in many ways I do take a maternal view and lens... Even as you're having a performance discussion, a difficult discussion with an employee, taking the lens that if this was your daughter or son, if they weren't good enough. Having that empathy, that purpose lens that yes, we need to profit as a corporation, but it's important that all of our stakeholders feel respected and have a safe place where they can grow.

Noted the second female respondent: "Some of the things that make me my best leader are feminine qualities, any gender can have feminine qualities of care, of nurturing. The things that make me a great mom and a great wife and a great sister and a great daughter - these are the same qualities that I've had to re-integrate into being my old self rather than separating them".

The male respondents spoke about their deep commitment to their employees' wellbeing, and in some cases the wellbeing of their customers and the environment, though they did not speak of this commitment with the same language. The corporate social purpose movement is not one that is generally discussed with a gender lens beyond a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion, though feminist critiques of capitalist systems have long existed. Indeed the most vocal and best-known proponents of corporate social purpose- Larry Fink, 18 of the 26 board members of the Business Roundtable (Business Roundtable, n.d.), Michael McCain, are men. Perhaps as more women take leadership positions and speak of their experience of purpose-based leadership, the language used to describe and catalyze the movement will also evolve to include particularly female experiences.

The founder advantage

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Four of the six interview subjects were founders of their company as well as Chief Executive Officers, with the fifth CEO leading a spinoff company and the sixth purchasing and significantly revamping an existing company. This is a distinct advantage for embedding purpose into the DNA of a company. As one CEO noted: “I wrote the values so, it would be weird if I wrote them in a way that didn't align with my own values”. Some respondents spoke of the challenges likely experienced by some industries where the product is, at least at face value, at odds with social purpose: “there are times when stakeholder interests do conflict in which case I think it would be dictated by the ownership structure and the size, and even the industry. How does an oil and gas company, they make oil- there are implications to the environment, they can't completely change that”, or simply not very resonant: “There are lots of instances, you'll see banks who say our purpose is to make life better for Canadians, or something like that. And in the end the way you're making life better is because you are helping them to manage their finances, and you the person on the team is really adding some zeros on their statement. You're so disconnected from making their life better”. In an interview with the podcast The Knowledge Project with Shane Parrish, Shopify Founder and CEO Tobi Lütke spoke of the difference between founders and professional managers, the latter excelling at stakeholder management and measurable and quantifiable improvement and the former being the keeper of the company's origin story, its purpose, and therefore has legitimacy (Parrish, 2022). Indeed, an earlier student research study on corporate social purpose led by the researcher identified the challenge of reverse-engineering purpose in a company where the product, industry, or management style and structure have not been purpose-driven to date (MacDonald, 2021), and this research echoes those insights.

Staff Layoffs: The litmus test

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Perhaps there is no greater test of social purpose, both in its expression as a balance of purpose with profit and its commitment to a meaningful employee value proposition, than when a CEO makes the difficult decision to lay off a percentage of their staff to address challenging economic conditions. This was a test for two of the interviewees, whose tech companies had to weather the challenging economic conditions of the day. In these cases, the decision was difficult, but fiscally responsible: “When you're growing and still maturing, you have to be stage appropriate, you have limited resources, it's hard to say ‘we want to do this but we may not be fully there yet’. We're on a journey. We're trying something but we maybe over-rotated”. In these instances, CEOs relied on the same leadership and communication fundamentals that helped their companies grow: symmetrical, clear, and kind. It is that authenticity that allows for departing employees to leave with grace and for employers to protect their reputation by mitigating against negative megaphoning: “a little over half of the people who were laid off reached out to me afterwards to thank me for their time at [the company]. It is also important in order to ensure that the remaining staff feel secure and remain motivated: “when we had that recent round of departures, we felt that we had built a communication that was empathetic to the situation and that understood what people's concerns were going to be and we shared it at an all-hands”. Purpose is important, but it is important to remember that the underlying structure that makes purpose possible must be healthy: “I always say, our company, we need to take care of it so it can take care of us. It feeds all of us. In some ways, the two are really intertwined”.

Limitations and Future Research

The employee survey was disseminated via the researcher's personal LinkedIn and Facebook accounts, with an invitation to respondents to share with their own networks. In

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addition to limitations due to a small sample size, results are not representative of the larger population. Indeed, while age range and tenure in the workforce were collected in addition to seniority and level of authority as part of the demographic question set, sample sizes were too small to report on. Interview subjects self-selected from a broader invitation sent by an executive at MaRS Discovery District. While every effort was made to reduce bias and to ensure anonymity, it is likely that respondents who volunteered comprise a subset of leaders who are deeply purpose-driven. Research results and subsequent analyses should be viewed as providing directional, rather than decisive, insight.

Opportunities for further research are plentiful and include a deeper exploration of employees' expectations and perceived performance on social purpose in order to determine more precisely their drivers and expectations around purpose. Employees' and CEOs' experience with layoffs as a test of purpose-driven leadership and communication would also generate deep insight into the tensions between purpose and profit, and how to effectively navigate them. A gender analysis of purpose-driven leadership would also help illuminate the role of female leaders in the purpose movement and point to new, and perhaps more inclusive ways to define leadership.

Conclusions

If the emerging purpose economy is about the intersection of social purpose and profit, perhaps purpose-driven leadership sits at the intersection of personal calling and strategic advantage. This research suggests that for purpose to truly be the counterpart and accelerant for a successful, profitable business and for corporate social purpose to emerge as the new dominant business model, the Chief Executive Officer must take a central role in manifesting and evangelizing that mandate. It cannot be delegated, and most importantly, it cannot be

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manufactured. Perhaps more so than any other business model, purpose-driven companies, and especially those led by their founder, are a direct reflection of their chief executive. It is from that locus that the CEO can effectively attract and motivate the type of passionate talent that will catalyze and amplify that purpose into a successful business and help it navigate massive societal changes. In the war for talent amid our society's tectonic generational shifts and social upheavals, social purpose may well be the secret ingredient to business growth. But it only works if you really mean it.

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Appendix A: In Depth Interview Questionnaire

Introduction

People define purpose-driven organizations and leaders in different ways. At its core, it's about putting societal purpose at the core of a business with the belief that a social purpose will make it not only more ethical and more resilient, but also more profitable. Many people describe it as a triple-bottom line: people, purpose, profit, and it is often activated in companies through ESG commitments, corporate social responsibility or corporate citizenship, or certifications.

1. To what extent is purpose a part of how you run your organization?
2. How important is purpose to your success, and in what ways?
3. When you think of your own role as the chief executive, how much of it is focused on purpose? If you had to broadly divide your time, what percentage would you say is spent on financial performance, vision and strategy, crisis management, and leading people?
4. Do you feel your personal values are reflected in your role as CEO? How has that evolved over the course of your career?
5. When it comes to communicating messages around purpose to staff, who in your organization owns that messaging?
6. When it comes to communicating messages around purpose to external audiences who in your organization owns that messaging?
7. To what extent do you feel that the CEO's role should include evangelizing the company's purpose? What are the best tactics for communicating purpose?
8. As the CEO, are there challenges to communicating a purpose agenda with your staff? Is it different for external audiences?

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Appendix B: Survey Questions

Thank you for completing this survey! It should take you no more than 5 minutes to complete. Let's start with a few simple questions to confirm you are eligible to participate.

1. Are you currently employed, either full-time, part-time, or on contract?

Yes (proceed)

No (terminate) Thank you for your time, but for this research, we are looking for people who are presently employed.

2. Is your employer based in Canada or operating in Canada?

Yes (proceed)

No (terminate) Thank you for your time, but for this research, we are looking for people whose employers are based or operating in Canada.

3. Is your employer a for profit business, a not-for profit organization, or a government entity?

For profit (proceed)

Not-for-profit organization (terminate) Thank you for your time, but for this research, we are looking for people who are employed by for-profit businesses.

Government entity (terminate) Thank you for your time, but for this research, we are looking for people who are employed by for-profit businesses.

Next is a set of 8 questions where you will be asked to rate your opinion on a scale of 1 to 7. But first, a quick introduction to our topic:

People define purpose-driven organizations and leaders in different ways. At its core, it's about putting societal purpose at the core of a business with the belief that a social purpose will make it not only more ethical and more resilient, but also more profitable. Many people describe it as a triple-bottom line: people, purpose, profit, and it is often activated in companies through ESG commitments, corporate social responsibility or corporate citizenship, or certifications.

1. On a scale of 1-7, where 1 is not at all important and 7 is extremely important, how important do you think purpose is to a **company's overall success**?

1- Not at all important

7- Extremely important

Don't know/not sure

Prefer not to say

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2. On a scale of 1-7, where 1 is not at all important and 7 is extremely important, **how important is it to you** that your employer is a purpose-driven company?

1- Not at all important

7- Extremely important

Don't know/not sure

Prefer not to say

3. Would you describe your employer as a purpose-driven company?

Yes

No

Don't know/not sure

Prefer not to say

(if "no", "don't know/unsure" skip to Q5)

4. On a scale of 1-7, where one is not well at all, and 7 is extremely well, how well or not well do you feel **your company lives up to its social purpose?**

1- Not well at all

7- Extremely well

Don't know/unsure

Prefer not to say

5. Who do you feel should be the **primary communicator** of your company's social purpose?

The Human Resources department

My manager

The Chief Executive Officer/President

The Corporate Social Responsibility department (or equivalent department)

Other : _____

Don't know/unsure

Prefer not to say

6. In your organization, who do you feel is the **most trustworthy and authentic communicator** of social purpose?

The Human Resources department

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My manager

My Chief Executive Officer/President

The Corporate Social Responsibility department (or equivalent department)

Other : _____

Don't know

Prefer not to say

7. On a scale of 1-7, where 1 is not at all important and 7 is extremely important, how important is it to you that your **CEO is a purpose-driven leader**?

1- Not at all important

7- Extremely important

Don't know

Prefer not to say

8. On a scale of 1-7, where 1 is not at all effective and 7 is extremely effective, how **effective do you feel your CEO** is as a purpose-driven leader?

1- Not at all effective

7- Extremely effective

Don't know

Prefer not to say

Just a few more questions to go!

9. In what **year range** were you born?

1997-2012

1981-1996

1965-1980

1946-1964

1928-1945

Don't know

Prefer not to answer

10. How **long** have you been in the workforce?

< 1 year

1 or more years, but less than 5 years

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- 5 or more years, but less than 10 years
- 10 or more years, but less than 20 years
- 20 or more years
- Don't know
- Prefer not to answer

11. How would you characterize your current role?

- I do not have anyone reporting to me.
- I manage one or more individuals.

12. Generally speaking, how would you describe the **level** of your role?

- I am an associate or coordinator
- I am a manager
- I am a director or executive
- Other _____
- Don't know
- Prefer not to say

One final question!

13. If you have any comments or insights on this topic that you would like to share, please do so here:

Thank you very much for your time!

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Appendix C: Survey respondents by demographic

	Number of respondents (n=127)	Percentage of respondents (n=127)
Age Group		
Born between 1965-1980	55	43.3%
Born between 1981-1996	51	40.2%
Born between 1946-1964	9	7.1%
Born between 1997-2012	3	2.4%
No answer	9	7.1%
Tenure in workforce		
20+ years of work	62	48.8%
10-19 years of work	44	34.6%
5-9 years of work	10	7.9%
1-4 years of work	2	1.6%
No answer	9	7.1%
Level of Seniority		
Director or executive	62	48.8%
Manager or specialist	41	32.3%
Associate or coordinator	13	10.2%
No answer	11	8.7%
Level of Authority		
Manager of people	75	59.1%
No direct reports	42	33.1%
No answer	10	7.1%

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