

PURPOSE

Why are you here?

It is a question

That can clarify

Direction

Or you can get

Lost in it

So think carefully

Why are you

Here?

In a world of change, purpose provides a strong foundation to leap forward from.

Providing the reassurance that not everything is changing. In times of challenge answering the question, “Why does this matter?” In our darkest and most extreme moments answering the question, “Why even bother?”

Change depends on people who care. People who are bothered by what is. Driven to turn what might be from aspiration into reality.

Driven by a deeply felt and strongly held sense of purpose.

All too often the organisational concepts of vision, mission and purpose get mixed up. It is surprisingly common for major companies to state their vision when in fact it is their mission, and vice versa. No wonder it is confusing when concepts such as mission and purpose are very similar yet still different.

Your vision is the future state you are aiming towards. Visions can be ‘seen’ so they describe the external state that will result when your mission is successfully achieved, in line with your purpose. Some advocate that visions should be aspirational and audacious yet ultimately achievable, while others state an aim that may never be fully reached but provides a guiding star – as you can consistently head towards a guiding star, yet you will never reach it.

In either case, the going will be difficult. So consistent progress towards your vision requires a highly motivated team in the face of setbacks and self-doubt. Driven by a strong sense of purpose.

Purposefully Define Your Reason for Being

Purpose defines the reason your organisation exists. With greater clarity than our common human ambition to make a difference. With greater breadth and emotional meaning than the more specific measurable goals that guide your strategy. While your goals and strategies will change over time, an organisation’s vision and purpose should rarely change. Unless they no longer serve and guide the organisation.

Mission is a concept that links vision and purpose. Vision is *where* you are heading. Purpose is *why* you exist. Mission is *what* you are driven to do to get from here to there. The difference is both nuanced and complex.

Greater clarity can be gained by thinking not just about mission but the role of missionaries. When Amazon Founder Jeff Bezos illuminated his driving philosophy behind the organisation’s success, he shared that “I strongly believe that missionaries make better products. They care more. For a missionary, it’s not just about the

business. There has to be a business, and the business has to make sense, but that's not why you do it. You do it because you have something meaningful that motivates you."¹

Missionaries believe in their message so strongly that they travel the world to share it with others while encouraging them to join their cause.² They are on a mission to create change. Which means your mission is not just words to passively sit on walls and slides. It needs to be the expression of a cause that passionately drives you forward.

Although all three concepts are important – typically there is not the need to precisely define and articulate all three. The distinction between just two of the concepts can be confusing enough. Add in a third and the extra layer of complexity will more likely confuse and hold your people back, rather than giving them the clarity needed to inspire and guide forward.

To help decide what guiding concepts matter most for your organisation, spend time looking at organisations you admire and see what concepts they define. Search the names of leaders you admire along with the words vision, mission or purpose in combination with the word 'interview' and see what you find. The process of exploring, while reflecting on the aspirations and motivating drivers for your own organisation, will help clarify your thinking.

The inherent complexity of these guiding concepts – particularly when you layer in other concepts such as organisational values – led to the evolution of further constructs such as the central organising principle³ or single organising idea.⁴ The aim of these unifying concepts is to simplify the confusion of all the other ideas to be communicated and remembered.

While this approach makes logical sense, the reality of life is that it is complex and multifaceted. Building a house is complex, with many different parts required to make it an enduring habitat. From doors to windows to walls and the roof, each is critically different yet combine to form a strong whole. The same goes for our organisations – from your vision to your purpose and values.

*Strategy in Action***MOTIVATING PURPOSE**

If everyone across your organisation can recite your purpose statement word-perfect, unfortunately this means you are unlikely to have defined an inspiring purpose – yet.

How can this be? It is because there is a significant difference between rote learning a phrase and passionately believing in a purpose.⁵

If your organisation has a purpose or mission statement, test the impact and resonance of it by asking someone in the team to tell you what it is. Be careful not to make it feel like a test and do not put them on the spot in front of others. Approach it as a casual conversation with a question like “What are your thoughts on our organisation’s purpose?”

A powerful statement of purpose should inspire people to express the organisation’s purpose in their own words. In alignment with the driving cause while bringing themselves into it. After all, each of us has unique ambitions and individual motivations. A purpose should motivate us forward into the future, not make us feel constrained in the present.

This dynamic of collaboratively exploring and expressing your organisation’s reason for being is a critical element of purpose development. If you are in the process of defining your purpose or mission, incorporate individual reflections as part of the process. If you already have a clearly defined and approved purpose, use the approach to emotively connect and align your team with the purpose.

Moving forward – purposefully.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

- Purpose provides a strong foundation to then adaptively leap forward from.
- The organisational concepts of vision, mission and purpose often get mixed up.
- Purpose defines the reason your organisation exists.
- Being able to recite a purpose word-perfect may indicate rote learning rather than passionate belief.
- A powerful sense of purpose also connects with individual reasons for being.