

The Sweet Spot of Purpose

A THREE-LEGGED STOOL FOR PRODUCTIVITY AND SUCCESS | DAN PONTEFRACT



Purpose has become table stakes.

Far too many corporate social responsibility statements and annual reports claim, “Our employees are our most important asset.” Is that what we are? Assets? No, we are not assets. We are not human capital. We are not headcount. You cannot count me.

We are the individuals who make up our organizations. We are team members. We are co-workers. We are colleagues. We are individuals. We are both leaders *and* followers. We strive for purpose in our lives, and in the organizations that we work for.

It matters not what level we reside on in the corporate hierarchy. We are all on the same team in defining and enacting that purpose. Team members are not an asset, but rather the key link to improving society.

The importance of purpose on the lives of employees, and for the betterment of society, has become table stakes. Indeed, the individuals that make up the organization are its most important advantage.

When there is a positive correlation and intersection of purpose between our lives and our work, the result is what I call *The Purpose Effect*. The Purpose Effect results in a higher calling, where individuals and organizations seek to improve society to benefit all stakeholders.

To paraphrase author Joseph Campbell, purpose is a word that offers the “possibility of bliss.”

We may look to Greek philosopher Aristotle for assistance as well. He believed and taught that human beings were driven by purpose, autonomy, and the natural desire to seek out and understand the truth. A person’s ideals manifest when they are pursuing and then attaining a life of purpose, ultimately the end state of human well-being. This end state is sometimes referred to as eudaemonia, the Greek word for human flourishing.

I strongly believe that the organization should not be viewed simply as a venue in which to be paid (to *make a wage*). If work is to *make a life*, as famed management guru Peter Drucker once suggested, the purpose of the organization needs to shift to include a greater degree of meaning. Thus, purpose ought to be felt and achieved at work as it is in the rest of our lives.

If this occurs, more individuals will be able to feel and connect to a sense of purpose in their roles, as well. If this occurs, individuals’ work roles can contribute to their ability to truly then make a life.

“Having a purpose to our work is convergent with our sense of who we truly are and what we stand for in life.” Dr. A.R. Elangovan

Purpose and Culture

While purpose in the workplace is imperative, leaders are potentially overlooking its significance to the overarching health of our civilization. My experience and research suggests purpose ought to be the main objective, and that it is usually the misalignment of the personal, role, and organizational categories of purpose that ensures the journey toward purpose never begins.

Organizations of any sort that are replete with heavily bureaucratic processes and hierarchically driven management styles may continue to exist simply because it is easier. In fact, mantras such as: “But this is how we’ve always done it,” are often invoked as the de facto rationale.

Engaged team members fuel sustainable success in an organization. Purpose and culture are a bit like fraternal twins. If the concept of purpose is solid and balanced—if the organization also portrays an open and collaborative culture—stakeholders ought to see improved results. But there remain far too many employees devoid of purpose, stuck in an organization that is the very definition of disengagement.

Over the course of a ten-year period, involving the analysis of more than 111,000 surveys, Queen's University unearthed several bottom line benefits to an engaged workforce, including:

- 26 percent less turnover
- 100 percent more unsolicited employment applications
- 20 percent less absenteeism
- 15 percent greater team member productivity
- 30 percent greater customer satisfaction levels

When the culture and purpose of an organization is one in which the team member feels engaged and can exhibit their own sense of role-based purpose, it is possible for all intended stakeholders to benefit.

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The Purpose Effect in Brief

For The Purpose Effect to materialize, the three categories of purpose—personal, organizational, and role—must be defined, aligned, and enacted.

When this has been accomplished, a “sweet spot” will materialize for both individuals and the organization.

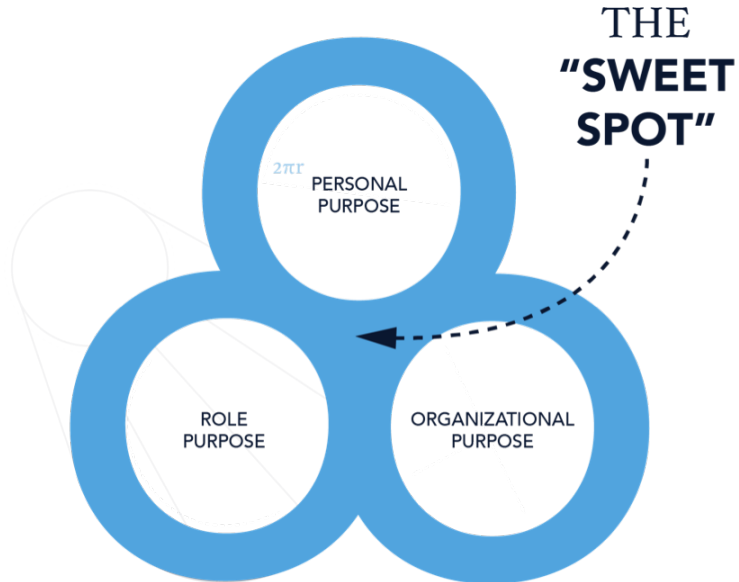
Each category that makes up The Purpose Effect is defined as follows:

Personal Purpose: What motivates someone in life; their why. An individual’s values, experience and beliefs inform personal decisions and actions.

Organizational Purpose: Why the organization exists. An organization’s principles, ethics and culture inform its ways of operating.

Role Purpose: Why a role exists in the organization. To achieve its goals and objectives, an organization establishes a variety of roles to support its mission.

A unique Venn diagram focusing on personal, organizational and role purpose outlines
The Purpose Effect:



Personal Purpose

An individual who seeks a personal sense of purpose in life will be one who is constantly developing, defining and deciding their values, priorities, attributes, and general ways of conducting themselves in their activities. It is a perpetual cycle of self-discovery.

For personal purpose to be identified—to reach their why—the questions of what, who, and how ought to be continually asked by the individual.

For someone to reach their personal purpose, they first must ask themselves how they plan to develop, define, and decide their purpose in life.

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Consider these questions for each:

Develop.

What is the individual doing to grow and establish their personal values, priorities and attributes?

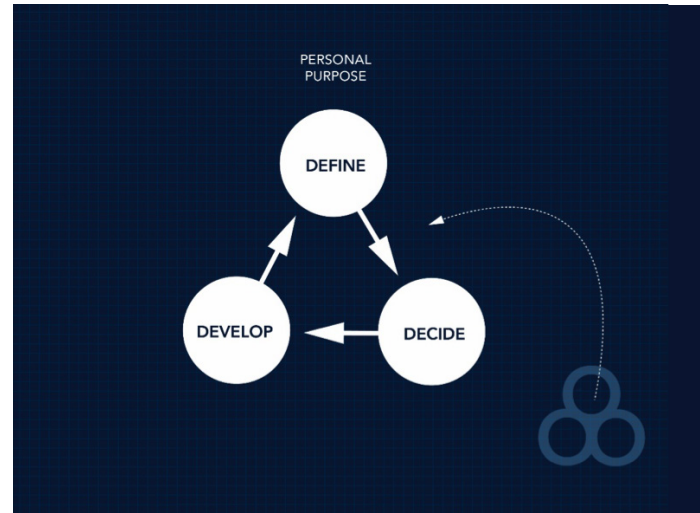
Define.

Who is the individual trying to become in life?

Decide.

How will the individual operate when balancing the realities of life with the opportunity for growth?

As these questions are repeatedly explored and answered throughout one's life, clarity of self comes into focus. If the answers can align with an individual's role at work and in parallel with the organization where they are employed, the individual is potentially on a path toward their own sweet spot of The Purpose Effect.



Organizational Purpose

The purpose of an organization ought to be to “provide service to benefit all intended stakeholders.” With a workforce that has discovered a sense of personal purpose in life—complimented by purpose in their role at work—the sweet spot for the organization can be achieved if Good DEEDS are exhibited. Good DEEDS is a model for organizations to follow that ensures a higher organizational purpose:

Delight your customers.

An organization ought to commit to working with and for the customer—continuously dedicated to delighting them while improving value—always remembering why the organization exists in the first place.

Engage your team members.

To improve value and service with customers, team members must feel as though there is purpose in their work—that they are engaged and flourishing in their role as part of a team—while possessing the opportunity to imagine, incubate, initiate, innovate, interact, and influence.

Ethical within society.

Ethics are what determines an organization’s integrity. It is the bridge of trust between customer

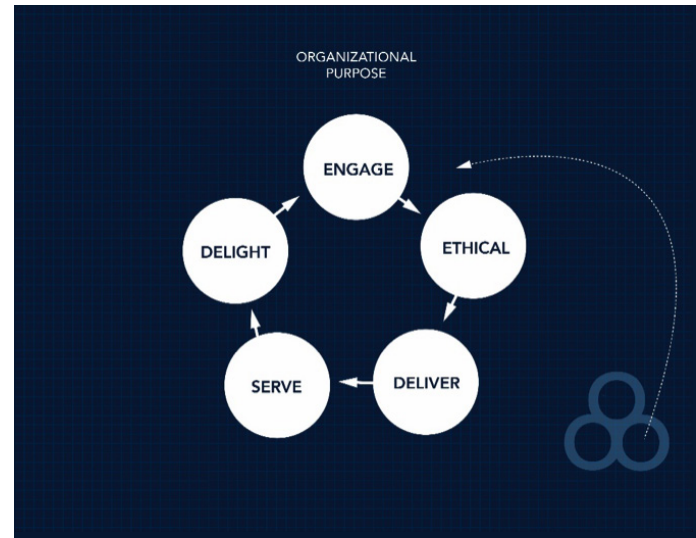
and team member. How is the firm taking responsibility for publicly setting targets (looking out for the interests of all stakeholders in society) through financially, environmentally, socially, and educationally improved means?

Deliver fair practices.

An organization's results are reflected by significantly improved people practices. If team members are able to work in an environment devoid of the existing and systemic operational inanities that are so prevalent in today's organizations, it will deliver both fairer and markedly improved business results in a new purpose-first organizational mindset.

Serve all stakeholders.

Recognizing that no organization is an island unto itself, the firm or group will deliver its results to all relevant stakeholders, realizing its responsibility as an integral partner in society's ecosystem that affects customers, team members, the community, and owners alike.



Role Purpose

Roles are created by the organization to achieve its mission and goals. Roles make up the whole of the organization. If there are no roles, there is no organization.

From the perspective of the team member, roles can be of varying tenures, too. Some individuals remain in a position for life (whether fulfilled or disengaged) whereas others are interested in very short stints or short-term contracts.

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If there are no roles, there is no organization.”*

Roles can come and go due to factors such as contraction, expansion, or the introduction of new technologies like automation or artificial intelligence. Regardless, when an individual is performing in their role at work for the organization and themselves, one of three different mindsets will likely be exhibited:

Job Mindset.

Performing transactional duties in return for compensation and not much else.

Career Mindset.

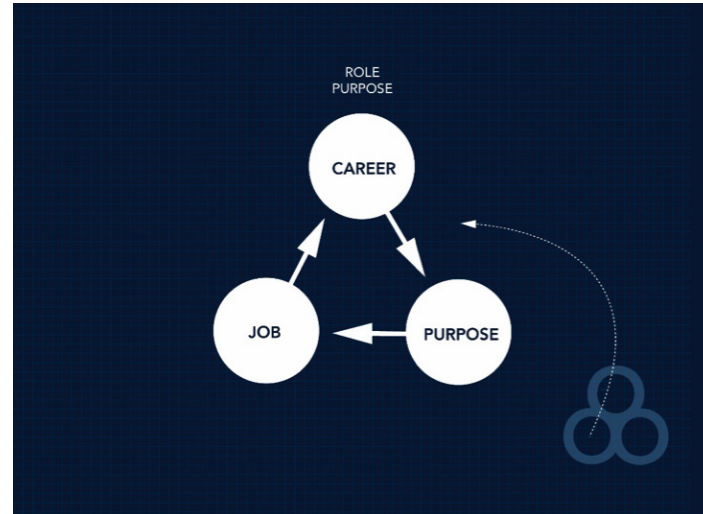
Focused on increasing one's career girth by advancing salary, title, power, team size, and/or span of control.

Purpose Mindset.

Passionate, innovative and committed to a meaningful and engaging workplace that serves and benefits all stakeholders.

An individual's role-based mindset, therefore, is the result of whether their personal purpose is in alignment with the organization's purpose, as well as with the duties required to perform in the role itself.

Often a job or career mindset is a result of misalignment between personal, organizational, and role purpose. For the sweet spot to be attained, I contend individuals ought to operate with a purpose mindset in their role for a majority of the time.



The Sweet Spot of Communitas

In its simplest form, the word “communitas” is both the feeling and spirit of togetherness. It is a term used to distinguish community, the point at which members feel as though they are on an equal level with one another, achieving its purpose in unison.

Communitas is the ultimate definition of a purpose-driven solidarity between the organization and team members.

I liken communitas to achieving the “sweet spot” for both team members and the organization.

Communitas instills humility and humanity, inculcating a high degree of compassion and understanding among its members. In essence, communitas is the shared journey of putting “Society First.” Communitas is the sweet spot. Communitas is when personal, organizational, and role purpose intersect.

When team members are committed, driven, and feel as though they are an integral part to the success of the organization, all parties will be achieving their own sense of communitas, and thus hitting the sweet spot.

The act of creating a community so that all team members not only demonstrate purpose in life and in their role, but “doggedly pursue the best interests of the organization” is an important action for all leaders to contemplate.

““ In essence, communitas is the shared journey of putting “Society First.” Communitas is the sweet spot. Communitas is when personal, organizational, and role purpose intersect.

Examples of Organizational Purpose

In 2010, Lindsay Hemric was appalled by the way in which many clothing manufacturers made their products. Sweatshops and environmentally unfriendly practices were the norm. Something had to be done. Her personal purpose was born.

Lindsay found her role purpose when she founded Teeki, an activewear firm that does the unthinkable: It takes recycled water bottles, invokes an eco-friendly process that harnesses the fibres from the bottles to then create clothing such as hot pants, tank tops and bell bottoms.

Teeki commits to a purposeful organizational DNA, serving all stakeholders. Indeed, as Teeki's corporate ethos suggests, the company dances to a different beat, stretches with the yogi, runs to the highest peak, and swims where the ocean becomes one, in its pursuit of putting purpose on par with profit.

Purpose can come when you set out to deliver "more," as well. Another example to highlight regarding a firm putting a greater purpose on par with profit is Uncharted Play. Founded by Jessica O. Matthews and Julia Silverman in 2011, Uncharted Play's mission is to deliver motion-based, off-grid renewable energy (MORE) into "everything that moves." The company

has designed both a soccer ball (called the Soccket) and a jump rope (called the Pulse) that produce energy after a few hours of use. Tellingly, the company believes that the concept of play can be used to prove that:

- Doing good doesn't need to be boring.
- Anyone, anywhere can be a social inventor.
- If people across the globe can connect and work together to address the issues facing humanity, the future is boundless.

Both Teeki and Uncharted Play (and its purpose-first founders) are committed to ensuring all stakeholders are being served, an example of the Good DEEDS of The Purpose Effect in action.

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The Fairest Phone of all

Fairphone is the world's first socially responsible and sustainable company to design, manufacture, and sell mobile phones. As the name suggests, the company manufactures mobile phones that are ethical—in that they are made from conflict-free minerals assembled by firms who also ensure fair wages for factory workers. The forty employees who work directly at Fairphone in Amsterdam think of themselves as caretakers of the Earth. They make a mobile phone, but do so ensuring they keep the greater good of society in mind.

Bas van Abel is the Founder and CEO of Fairphone and clearly wants to change the world. In particular, Bas sees the world needing to evolve from what he calls its “pernicious and unsustainable ways.” His perspective is both reactive and inclusive: “We are part of everything. None of us at Fairphone feels as though the financial system is connected to who we are, and as a result, we all need to collaboratively think differently and act differently, too.”

Like most companies, Fairphone aims to make a profit. But less common is that the company refuses to do so at the expense of its purpose. Fairness, balance, and accountability to all stakeholders—including its employees—sits at the center of the organization's purpose. This is what a purpose-driven, “sweet spot” organization looks like.

Example of Personal/Role Purpose

Tim McDonald is a fascinating example of someone who has redefined his personal and role purpose.

Tim started out his professional life in real estate. He was very successful. But something was not right. He eventually became the Director of Communications at the Social Media Club Chicago. That did not fill the nagging void of personal purpose either. He was still empty.

Based on his work in Chicago, The Huffington Post approached him to relocate to New York City and become its first community manager for their HuffPost Live service. But a funny thing happened during his time at The Huffington Post.

While Tim was working in a role that fueled some of his passions, he found he was still not entirely fulfilled. While taking part in a Changers of Commerce meeting in Dallas where he was speaking on stage about his role at HuffPost, leaders from Be The Change (BTC) Revolutions—an organization that aims to mix communities with social good—approached him.

They asked Tim if he might be interested in joining their social council for the No Kid Hungry foundation. He jumped at the chance, but after a few months of his volunteer efforts—

and realizing that his true purpose and focus in life was one of giving—he was asked by BTC to join them in a full-time capacity.

He accepted and has been in the “sweet spot” ever since.

“Becoming more vested in working with organizations doing good, has allowed for my work and life to be purposeful beyond my wildest dreams.” Tim McDonald

What can individuals do today?

Individuals aiming to create the sweet spot for themselves ought to contemplate the following actions:

- 1. Write a Personal Declaration of Purpose.** To create a personal declaration of purpose:
 - Incorporate how you decide to operate your life—how you will show up—each and every day.
 - Be succinct, specific and jargon-free, but ensure the declaration is equally expressive.
 - Make it personal, make it yours, and incorporate strengths, interests and/or core attributes.

2. Don't Stop Believing (and Developing). Variety is one of the keys to establishing and maintaining one's personal purpose. For individuals truly to achieve personal purpose, they need to come into contact with a multitude of situations and participate in a variety of projects in order to grow.

- Participate in programs such as a short-term rotation, job shadowing, as well as being part of cross-departmental project teams.
- Join a club, volunteer at the community center, register for a local program, be part of your city's various initiatives or meet new people at local events are ways to learn from others in the attempt to develop and hone personal purpose.
- Any type of formal, informal, or social learning opportunity is going to assist as well.
- Network! The Grant Study from Harvard University, for example, famously proved that people who were more connected with others were three times as likely to have achieved success compared to those without such relationships

What can organizations do today?

1. Write an Organizational Declaration of Purpose. By establishing a purpose-first strategic intent that serves the interests of all stakeholders, an organization likely will have far greater buy-in from its team member population to achieve its mission and objectives. When team members are bought in and able to demonstrate purpose in their role, the organizational benefits begin to quickly accrue. Thus, the creation of an organizational “declaration of purpose” helps deliver The Purpose Effect. To create an organizational declaration of purpose:

- Embed stakeholders into the declaration, ensuring all applicable interest groups are addressed.
- Be succinct, specific and jargon-less, but ensure it is equally expressive.
- Make it relatable to both customers and team members.

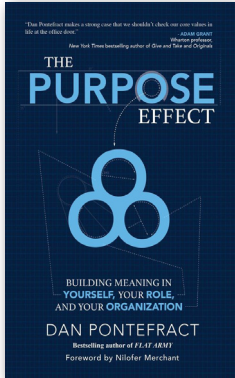
2. Serve All Stakeholders. If an organization is going to create a declaration of purpose, it should also be prepared to serve all of its stakeholders. There is a fairly easy way to summarize all of the stakeholders the organization ought to be serving. If it is putting its customers first, it does so through its team members (who are ideally engaged, demonstrating personal and role-based purpose) who then aim to assist the community in which they live, and the society

they are a part of. If applicable, owners/shareholders are also served but they are considered equal to the other four stakeholders.

- Customers
- Team Members
- Community
- Society
- Owners/Shareholders (if applicable)

Regardless of our role in the organization, each of us are both a leader and a follower. And in business today, a sense of purpose matters more than ever—whether we are leading with it, following it, or pursuing it. It has moved from a “nice to have,” to a strategic business imperative. **An organization’s purpose is not the icing on the cake, but the cake itself. It is core to what matters. It is central to making a difference in society.** 📌

Info



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR | Dan Pontefract is Chief Envisioner at TELUS, a Canadian telecommunications company, where he heads the Transformation Office, a future-of-work consulting group that helps organizations enhance their corporate cultures and collaboration practices. Previously as Head of Learning & Collaboration at TELUS, Dan introduced a new leadership framework called the TELUS Leadership Philosophy—that dramatically helped to increase the company’s employee engagement to record levels of nearly 90%. A renowned speaker, Dan has presented at multiple TED events and also writes for *Forbes*, *Harvard Business Review*, and *The Huffington Post*.

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