

Overview of discussion at Blueprint meeting for Coaches and Consultants – 11 November 2021

Meeting topic: Purpose led strategy and decision taking

Objectives:

- Explore what purpose led strategy is and what it is not
- Give participants the opportunity to break into smaller groups to meet each other and share insights, experience and learning from their work on how to help businesses have a purpose led strategy and make purpose led decision taking
- Introduction our new knowledgebase – inviting people to use it and feedback their learnings

In advance of the meeting participants were invited to do some pre work (see the end of this note)

Purpose-led strategy

To help frame the discussion on purpose led strategy, Dee Corrigan who leads Blueprint's work with corporates, led a conversation with Belden Menkus, Helen Sieroda & Micael Johnstone.

The following points came out of the conversation:

What is a purpose-led strategy and what is it not?

- Strategy needs to point and to drive – it needs to connect to what matters to people, especially the leadership
- It is a question not an answer
- It is not about making money over here and doing something 'good' alongside. It needs to get to the heart of what the company is doing
- It has to be lived and be part of the everyday culture of the organisation
- It is not a shallow branding exercise – a nice story that is then communicated out. It has to feel authentic and reflect day to day experience.
- It is not philanthropy or an evolution of CSR

In developing a purpose-led strategy, what is different about the process?

- The process is about what is working and what is not
- It is vertically and horizontally inclusive – it not done in 'secret' but brings in other voices and participants
- It makes a difference – but recognises that it is not possible to do everything. It has some focus.
- It lives in the way the company does what it does, and is reflected the processes, systems and how the organisation shows in the way it relates to people - customers suppliers etc
- In order to align to its purpose, sometimes the organisation needs to make a big shift, pivoting its strategy building on its core competencies. The following examples were shared:
 - An Independent Financial Advisory business - the business was paid by large insurance companies to sell its products. The IFA's purpose was to help their customers manage their investments well. The questions they considered in developing a purpose led strategy included: Who are they seeking to serve? Who are their 'customers'? Can they 'serve' one group when they are paid by another? This led to a big shift in how they

were paid going forward which created a shift in their strategy, culture and how they thought and did things which took a number of years.

- Royal DSM - which moved from being a coal mining company to Health, Nutrition & Bioscience, applying science to improve the health of people, animals and the planet.
- Orsted - moved from being profitable fossil fuels business to focus on green energy.
[From fossil fuels to green energy the Orsted story | London Business School](#)

How would you approach coaching someone leading or contributing to the development of a purpose led strategy?

Helen shared the following thoughts as a coach:

- personal and organisational purpose become entangled – it is hard to have the one conversation without the other
- what are the ‘seeds’ and what does it take to nurture them? how to work with what they have already got
- how to build a new world in the shell of the old
- don’t see the goal as separate from how to achieve it – how you build it is as important as what you build
- explore how open they are to other’s ‘seeds’ and listening to other voices
- change can be uncomfortable – help them to build their capacity, psychological safety and collaboration
- hold their feet to the fire
- in bring in a perspective be intentional – offer something and see how it lands as opposed to ‘telling’

Dee added that in our work at Blueprint a question we often ask is: what assumptions are you making about people or why the business is here?

We then broke into smaller groups to explore the following questions:

Think about a client and how they / their company approaches strategy development and implementation:

1. What is the reality today
2. What tensions are emerging?
3. What can we as coaches and consultants do to help?

After the discussion participants were asked to reflect on what they took away from the discussion and share anything they wanted to share via the chat. These are the reflections that were shared

Reflections shared by participants:

- I love this from Helen earlier 'Goal not separate from the process'. We have to find joy and meaning in the how as much as the what.
- 1) not a quick fix. 2) leadership and what they believe matters. 3) coaching and deep ended questions matter.
- The importance of Time and Space and Reflection were my key takeaways

- Lead with a big question rather than a big answer
- Sit with what is even if this is uncomfortable.
- Go slow to move fast
- FESTINA LENTE! "Make haste slowly"...
- As Coaches, we can help raise awareness of the Benefits and Need to develop Purpose beyond Profit and Performance.
- A broad theme of barriers that get in the way of our work: getting boxed into a too-narrow issue, mental models and habits, not looking enough beyond the boundary of the organisation.
- We are all human - bring out the humanity - emotional side of moving forward
- Humanity and education about what needs to be solved before deciding your part in solving it. The rational doesn't make change happen if there is no emotional connection.
- I'm leaving thinking about what our assumptions are about the corporate world and how we follow the 'unwritten' rules without questioning - like wearing a tie - and how these go much deeper into the culture of an organisation
- When strategy fees stale, mechanical, rigid - time to bring in human stories and emotion to inspire creativity. Purpose is a fertile ground for this!
- Very interesting discussion. Common thread: the importance of connecting conscious strategy with unconscious actions/assumptions/habits/culture so meaningful change can take place.
- Clients WANT to do the right thing but they are STUCK. They are stuck by the organisational culture, by current practices and by the fear of getting it wrong. Coaches and consultants can help by holding a mirror, create a safe space, asking better questions, refocussing clients on their real raison d'être.
- Rational won't get us there – we need rational + emotional
- For me it is about how we take all the different things that we do and take them to the heart of businesses. With the scale of the challenges we are facing right now, we need to move the direction of the corporate tankers.
- Co-create (instead of top down)
- Make it human and allow it to have personality and empathy was a take out for me.
- Purpose fills a longing in people to BELONG, to belong to a tribe / company who cares about what they care about. BUT, trust in whether the company really means it is fragile and can easily be undone. So as coaches we can help leaders to connect deeply to purpose, to change behaviours and become more self-aware of how they are perceived.
- Must have leaders that are willing and open to others' ideas. Self aware - no narcissists! So space and time to explore and bring in perspectives (external key so not just the water you're swimming in). See the system and consider what it serves and what more it can achieve i.e. purpose
- This is a slow burn and the tensions still exist and will be greater as we go on and opinions on what best serves society are more polarised...but that's a sign we're getting there!
- The disconnect that can happen between purpose and everyday nitty gritty behaviours. As coach we can shine a light on the disconnect between espoused and enacted purpose & values.
- Also holding space for tensions to be articulated and worked with.
- Strive to unlock and align the values, creativity and passion of employees with organisational goals
- I see tensions between personal Purpose and Business Purpose (or lack of).
- Importance of space to explore and cross pollinate - more than ever in the busy periods
- Purpose is a natural journey for me, us and others. Natural is unlikely to be normal in the moment and at the start.

- Don't avoid the tension, let them surface, draw awareness to it, explore how to transcend
- To explore what it means to think like a system and act like an entrepreneur
- So many people want to make a positive difference which is really inspiring but there is a lot of education to do on what real purpose and impact looks like.
- I also take away how the gap between 'now' and the desired 'mission/vision/purpose' can be a real source of motivation and direction (i.e. a productive tension - not just a negative one).
- Thank you for facilitating such a thought provoking session and so interesting to meet so many purpose led humans! Raising human consciousness and connecting individuals with their own personal purpose, whilst creating the culture to act is key ... Is post growth an answer? I have more questions now than answers!!
- Coaches & consultants, together with a shared understanding of purpose can support, challenge and hold clients to account!

Pre work:

To help make the most of our time at the meeting participants were asked to:

1. Complete the course on Purpose led strategy in our new knowledgebase (25-30 minutes).
You can access this here: [Purpose-led strategy | A Blueprint for Better Business \(blueprintforbusiness.org\)](https://blueprintforbusiness.org)
2. Watch our webinar [Purpose and everyday decision making - Zoom](#) – where our chair of trustees Sue Garrard, former EVP Sustainable Business and Communications at Unilever discusses with Dee Corrigan how purpose comes to life in organisations through the choices people make every day, drawing on her work with large multinational companies.
3. Reflect on the following questions:
 - What are your key takeaways from the course (and listening to the discussion on the webinar)?
 - Did any of the points made strike you in particular? Why?
 - Is there anything that you might do differently in your work based on the insights shared?