

Blueprint meeting for Coaches & Consultants - 21 April 2022 - Overview of discussion

The objectives of the meeting were to create a space for people to explore together a broader range of areas including:

- how we are seeing our work in the ‘purpose’ space evolving,
- what changes if any we are all seeing in the CSR, corporate responsibility and sustainability functions in the companies we are working with and to what extent this work is integrated with their work on purpose
- how we can all help more companies to be truly purpose led, to move beyond incremental change to change that will have a faster and more positive impact on people and planet
- the challenges we face and the tensions we hold, including helping our clients recognise when their efforts are driving change and when they are helping to support business as usual

The following pre work was suggested:

Reading:

- [What is the relationship between purpose, CSR, sustainability and ESG? | A Blueprint for Better Business \(blueprintforbusiness.org\)](#) - this is a short section in our knowledgebase and should only take a few minutes to read
- Pages 14-18 in this report produced by Forum for the Future [Download.ashx \(forumforthefuture.org\)](#) – again these should only take a few minutes to read

Some questions to reflect on:

1. Do you recognise the mindsets outlined in the Forum for the Future report (set out on pages 14-18) - how do they show up in your relationships across the businesses you work with?
2. What is your ambition for your work with business?
3. How do you recognise when your efforts are driving change and when they are helping to support business as usual? What might be the common traps to avoid?
4. What would need to change in the businesses you work with to help you to recognise your ambition?

Overview of discussion at the meeting

Some reflections from Blueprint’s work:

Companies increasingly understand they need to change – and struggle with the ‘how’
Business leaders increasingly understand the why – the challenge has become the how. The questions we hear from businesses now are: how do you do this well and how do we assess our progress. The answer will be different for each company – there is no universal route map. We encourage experimentation and questioning/challenging assumptions. Helping leaders to be comfortable with not having all the answers.

We are learning about this evolution of practice through our work with businesses and are sharing what we are learning via our Knowledgebase to help coaches, consultants and practitioners in business to use.

The landscape around purpose is changing – there is an increasing focus and awareness of ESG, sustainability and responsible business but there isn't always a clear narrative around how they fit together and how, together with purpose, they inform strategy.

We are seeing a rapid increase in sustainability roles - but there is a danger that in seeking to address climate change businesses forget the 'S' – both the E and the S need to be addressed together if we are to achieve a just transition.

Are we moving fast enough to solve the systemic/existential threats society is facing?

We will not make the systemic changes needed company by company. Yes, there are specific individual challenges but there are also a lot of shared experiences and learnings that could help companies move faster. How can companies be encouraged to share what worked, and what didn't? We try to connect people to share experiences. Consultants can also help by sharing the best practices across the companies they work with – and with each other.

Reaching more people (new business challenge and opportunity)

At the moment we speak to people/organisations who are already on board with purpose or those who challenge it. But how do we reach the silent majority, the cynics and those who feel purpose is a great idea but can't see how they can apply it in their role/organisation? The growing number of people interested and organisations working on being purpose-led is key to the transition.

The role of professional services

Blueprint is also at the early stages of working with professional services firms. It is notable that the motivation here seems to be a conscious discomfort with the status quo: What is guiding the partnership now? What is the organisation's responsibility in meeting the needs/challenges of society? If the world needs a system change what is our job and are we delivering?

Purpose as Strategy and Purpose as Culture

Being purpose led means a core business strategy that is informed by the purpose, is clear around how purpose links sustainability, governance etc. and seeks to have a positive impact on society through its core business – but it is also about how the company shows up in its relationships – its culture. You need both together.

Two table discussions followed examining the following questions:

Table discussion (1)

Looking at your clients:

What are you noticing in how they approach 'making purpose matter' in their organizations?

- *What are they doing / how are they responding? How are they organized? Are you seeing a shift in their 'pioneering edges'?*
- *What changes if any are you are seeing in the CSR, corporate responsibility and sustainability functions in the companies you are working with and to what extent is their work integrated with their work on purpose?*
- *What would need to change in the businesses you work with to accelerate the change?*
- *How could you help them?*

The following themes emerged from the discussions:

- The need for CEO ownership of purpose. The ability of the CEO to create the conditions for a shift in culture is key to purpose being truly embraced.
- How do you partner at the Board to keep their purpose journey top of mind?
- Purpose needs to be owned in the front office - if purpose / sustainability stays in the back office it will always be a hygiene factor or bolt on. Only when it is seen as front office does everyone start taking note.
- Many of our clients at CEO level are female. Are more female CEOs implementing purpose than male?
- CEOs feel trapped, scared – doing the best they can in difficult circumstances. CEOs often feel afraid and prefer to focus on a desired future rather than see the present. Fear/mindset for change is a big blocker – pioneering (sometimes things that seem old fashioned in one industry can be huge steps for others)
- Leadership – getting comfortable with not having all the answers. Being ready for uncertainty (Margaret Heffernan) #Resilience
- Organisations need the time, space, skills and motivation to hold the necessary conversations and make real change. This needs to be driven from the top and sustained, as it will be uncomfortable
- Link between CSR/Sustainability/Purpose - sustainability is closely related to company's attitudes to strategy and innovation. Sometimes a shift to truly purpose led requires a company to take things back to ground level with products/services and rebuild from there.
- Old tropes still at play – “good’ work is what you do after you’ve made your money
- Purpose and sustainability professionals often don’t get the airtime / set up to succeed that they need
- How do you avoid pushing doing the ‘wrong’ thing into someone else’s silo?
- Candy comms – making inspirational videos as purpose washing that avoids tackling deeper issues
- Looking at progress in the round (the E and the S) - Tesla example – known as having a positive impact through its core product but at what cost to the people in its supply chain?
- Moving from purpose as strategy to purpose as culture is vital – but hard!
- Purpose influencing culture and culture influencing purpose. The role of culture in blocking / enabling purpose
- Business sacrifice is an important part of the process. Sacrifice has consequences. Mechanisms to help organisations work through where sacrifice / right decisions might conflict with financial decisions
- The influence of colleagues – current & potential. Covid demonstrated that change can happen swiftly - burgeoning groundswell of bottom up agitation / tension and its power to drive shifts at the top. People are conscious of the speed of change around covid responses and keen to see it applied elsewhere
- There are many entry points to the purpose conversation. We need to start where the business / leader is – be that brand awareness, compliance, employee engagement, market share etc. and expand!
- Find, work with and amplify what’s already working – the case for change may be much stronger thanks to demonstrable examples.

- People can hold a number of competing ideas at once – how to help move out of safety mode (especially as the economic environment is so tense) and tap into core human values
- Development of purpose led strategy needs to be supported / implemented with coaching / brand/ marketing / comms all aligned to the strategy.

Some questions held:

- How do we support change makers to stay and work from within? - purpose is not alive at an organisational level yet – it is still people/individuals that are able to see what needs to change and need to be enabled/empowered
- How do we accelerate change to answer huge systemic challenges – sharing knowledge, vulnerability?
- How can we accelerate our support and the impact that it has?
- How might we build communities of practice around the major barriers / where organisations get stuck?
- How can we build a really vibrant community of practice?
- Who is working where – can coaches & consultants be a collaborative link of learning (physical knowledgebases)?
- How can we link and incorporate this thinking into more traditional & management skills training?

Table discussion (2)

Looking at your approach:

- *What are you noticing about your approach and how you sell your work to your clients?*
- *What is contributing to any gap between the work you are selling and your ambition? [e.g. yours or your clients assumptions? The type of businesses you have access to? The propositions you offer? other?]*
- *Reflect – examine in yourself - what gets in the way? when you get to the sticky stuff when does your courage let you down? What might give you more courage?*
- *If you do find yourself largely doing the work that is needed and that matches your ambition – how did you get there?*

The following themes emerged from the discussions:

- How we add value as consultants: agitating, asking difficult questions, convening different internal stakeholders. The courage to ask tough questions which provoke the CEO / leadership team to think differently. Asking the uncomfortable questions is part of our job (or should be!). The power of a client uncovering the conscious discomfort themselves through the questions you ask.
- Facilitate conversations. Empower the people who do the work to put together case studies to make their point and present to decision makers! Bring awareness to topics that may make people around the table uncomfortable.
- Who is your 'client' and how does that affect the questions you ask?
- 'Pricking the social conscience of Boards'

- How do you talk about purpose with clients if your work/remit is very specifically focused elsewhere? The question is rarely – ‘help me find purpose for my company’ but it is often the answer!
- Meeting people where they are e.g. use finance language for those with a profit mindset – a journey to bring them on to questions that might encourage a purpose-led approach – this can feel like compromise but it is key to bringing more people into this work and building a network of allied people within organisations. Consultancy is in some ways a constant compromise because you are working in the real world not the ideal world campaign groups are aiming for – gradual and incremental shifts in right direction
- Use the leverage of clients’ clients to effect significant change
- The client’s purpose doesn’t have to be differentiated
- Choosing whether to work in a job with purpose in the title or work for a company with a built in purpose
- Being transparent about the need for both profit and purpose – it is not an either or. Profit is the fuel for purpose. A good culture is key to successful implementation of purpose. Untie the shame around talking about money – encourage radical transparency e.g. workers have a right to good jobs and fair pay, profit is what generates/makes that possible. How to show that purpose must be linked with a company’s core work – it is not volunteering, charity or CSR.
- Sharing the good stories to inspire/catalyse/invigorate - celebrating success, amplifying the best practices, and also being conscious that this is not easy
- Each generation thinks it is discovering things that actually others have worked on for years before
- We need basic understanding not the solution. What is the need? then form the solution together
- What is your ‘platform’ for getting into conversations with clients?
- The ‘gulp’ factor as a barrier – finding it difficult to talk about money
- Imposter syndrome – the chipmunk in your head – can I, can’t I? internal saboteur
- It is OK to name anything that creates a reaction
- The perils of ‘othering’ versus meeting in the middle
- The gap between selling and ambition
- Are we selling or partnering?
- The power of the network – individually we hold pieces of the jigsaw and together we could make a bigger impact

Some questions held:

- How do we enable the continued shift in identity – to one that includes purpose AND profit?
- How to further help others? – further sharing / communication of examples
- Learn – more about participants / different approaches. Today was a taster
- How do people shift from why to action?
- Importance of collaboration and communication – how can we support each other/how can we call on each others’ skill sets if we don’t have the answer for a client who can we bring in?