

## Overview of discussion - Virtual Blueprint meeting for coaches and consultants – 7 and 9 November 2022

### Objectives:

To explore what we are all learning from the work companies are doing in seeking to connect the organisation's purpose with the personal purpose of their employees, including:

- What are the dominant narratives around this work?
- What if any tensions arise from this work to help us to do it more effectively?
- Are there any potential 'shadow sides' we should watch out for?
- What can the lens of dignity bring to this work?

### Pre-work:

Suggested reading:

- [How work can be made meaningful \(theconversation.com\)](#) - Katie Bailey
- [Help your employees find purpose--or watch them leave | McKinsey](#)

Some questions to reflect on:

- Think of a time when you felt fulfilled at work – what contributed to this?
- Think of a time when you felt unfulfilled – what contributed to this?
- Personal purpose – what does it mean to you?

### Meeting framing:

We have discussed organizational purpose at many of our previous meetings – at this meeting we wanted to focus more on personal purpose, the seemingly growing trend for companies to seek to connect their employees' personal purpose with that of the company. Tensions emerge in much of our work and well-intentioned initiatives always cast shadows. Having an understanding of these tensions helps us to do the work more effectively.

We also wanted to bring the lens of dignity to the discussion (each person is a someone not a something), as respecting the dignity of people is in Blueprint's view a key part of being purpose-led.

We shared the following video clip [Viktor Frankl & Man's search for meaning - YouTube](#).

Donna Hicks in her work 'Leading with Dignity', talks about different manifestations of dignity – in ourselves, in others and in the world around us. She calls this the 3 Cs (connections): Connecting to our own dignity, connecting to the dignity of others, and connecting to the dignity of something greater than ourselves. This 3rd can take on different interpretations such as a faith, a connection to the natural world or a purpose that contributes to the greater good – something that gives meaning to our lives.

### The questions we discussed:

- What are you noticing in terms of tensions - looking at this from the perspective of the organisation doing the work to help its employees to find their personal purpose?
- Is this different when looking at this from the lens of what the individual person needs – as opposed to what the company needs?
- What are the benefits of this work and what might the watch-outs / shadow sides be?

- What would need to be true for you to engage in this work in an authentic way?

#### Reflections shared in the discussion:

- For an organisation to wholeheartedly endorse and champion the exploration of personal purpose they need to be brave. What is the impact of these conversations? How can space be created for what comes next?
- The outcome of the work could be that people realise they are not in the right job and they end up leaving – employers need to manage and prepare for this.
- If a company is seeking a transformation to become purpose-led – it might be a positive thing, for both the company and the people concerned, if some people that are not aligned with a purpose-led approach decide to move on.
- The connection between organizational and personal purpose is more important the more power and influence you have. But it does play into decision making at other levels in the organization e.g. why did you want to work for this organisation in particular?
- Inclusion – if the work results in a culture that is so strong that ‘only one kind of person fits in here’ the danger is it can become ‘cult-like’ and can exclude diversity of thought
- Do employees feel compulsion to be forced into a particular purpose?
- A blurring of the lines of what is expected at work – the work could uncover a host of questions that people might otherwise not give thought to
- Tensions around loading expectations about the job and the organisation – no job is ever perfect
- Is the idea of 'individual/personal purpose' a bit grandiose and daunting? People feel the need to get to some perfect articulation. 'What you really care about' might be a better framing.... what is resonating? what are you resisting?
- Personal purpose is linked to a calling - not a term used so much anymore. We can ask ourselves: what have I been given to share? It is not about inventing personal purpose but about how I am going to steward my purpose?
- One of the things that makes purpose work so fickle to work with, is capturing it. For a lot of people it is living your values. Not about who is the cleverest at articulating it. Purpose is about participation. Is it easier for a Chief Executive to actualize their purpose because of their role, harder further down when there are delegated projects to work on.
- Context is key. If you work with a charity or social enterprise where everyone understands the purpose and probably chose to work there for that reason, it should not be difficult for people to align their personal purpose, but different if it is a big corporate with a ‘vanilla’ purpose.
- Purpose means different things to different people at different ages and stages of life. I've heard a 70-year-old say their purpose is being alive and enjoying life.
- Enabling people to connect with the essence of their seven-year-old self.
- People need meaning – day to day meaning in their work. But it is not healthy to expect people to find all their meaning in work – that is not the aim of this work.
- There was some discussion about personal purpose and meaning. Clarifying what we mean by purpose seems important. Some saw purpose and meaning as different things. The Map of Meaning work from Marjolein Lips-Wiersma and Lani Morris is helpful - this is about finding meaning in work, which is different to purpose (though overlaps with it).

- It is not about making a 'connection' between the corporate and a person's personal purpose – it is about exploring the question – is this a company I want to lend my sense of meaning to?
- Seeking to enable people to lend their meaning to the company vs connecting their purpose with that of the company. A humble invitation to allow people to make the connection allows people to make their own connections. Don't ask me to connect – I will decide if I want to do that!
- What are the blockers why people don't feel meaning at work?
- Focus on essence rather than purpose – what is the DNA of the organisation so it comes alive and people are free to explore?
- Culture and leadership – creating the conditions for people to show up as the individuals they are – and also as committed to the organization
- Supporting leaders to cede control, let go of ego and be vulnerable – this is emergent work which can make leaders uncomfortable
- Finger pointing to the moon - there is something about the purpose that creates an attraction.
- Give people space to reflect on personal values but also to explore their identity.
  
- Living out personal purpose or even working for a purposeful organization is not the experience for the vast majority of people – it is a luxury. Most people don't have the agency / freedom / privilege to just get up and leave their job
- People in their lives need a job, because of the system. So they take a job, not necessarily tuned in to their personal purpose. It's a job to get money, for whatever reason. This structure suppresses or displaces tuning in to 'what am I all about?'
- People need to work to pay their bills. Are we in danger of promoting the purpose aspects as more laudable? Classic example during the pandemic - people used to say 'at least I don't have to stack shelves at Sainsburys.' Suddenly shelf stackers were 'key workers' and laudable. I was asked, does my value mapping work apply to say a plumber. Yes, there is value in everyone.

#### What would need to be true for you to engage in this work in an authentic way?

- Visible commitment to implementation of purpose-led change before we take on the work - to avoid 'purpose-washing'
- A genuine will to explore being purpose led. Having said that, it's not our work to 'sell' purpose but to listen out for and address presenting problems while challenging assumptions and beliefs and creating the space for questions of why we exist to arise naturally, which they inevitably will.
- Is it authentic or just the latest senior leadership / PR and marketing project ?
- If incentives are not aligned to the purpose there will be a disconnect
- The work needs to align to the way people are actually treated
- Some organisations use purpose as strategy – extrinsic incentives linked to strategy don't work. Critical to move away from operational-style purpose which has the effect of limiting engagement. Purpose needs to be inspiring - it's the organisation's 'why'
- What are you going to do with that uncovered personal purpose? How do organisations then provide support so the work does not cause cognitive dissonance / drive people out of the organization because they opened something up and they now can't act on it.

- It is important to be clear up front what is a corporate and what is a personal purpose – and do this phase of the work carefully
  - What outcomes are the organisation seeking from the work? Do I feel they are ready to go on the journey? A sense of authenticity
  - Conditions to be true: A view of what purpose organisation is. Need to see client wanting to engage in that work authentically. Realise they won't get it 'right' straight away. But to understand the work to be done is more than a statement. Don't need to measure this, it is an inherent good. Measure how they feel. Needs integrity and authenticity.
  - Is there a genuine appetite – not just about a purpose statement but helping to lean in and connect to the work they are doing? Test how deep the desire is to lean in
  - Being open to not knowing the answer and being curious about what others will bring. Being open minded to the lived experience of the work
  - How to shift them from seeking this work as a 'fix' to truly partnering
  - Need to understand the purpose of purpose – as an activator for direction and emotion – why we come together collectively – a platform for our fulfilment. If we forget that it just becomes a statement / poster.
  - Purpose is - Why do I exist? The problem is, if it is decided by leadership and doesn't filter down it diffuses to meaningless and becomes operational. This work should be about ensuring purpose (i.e. the organisation's 'why') is properly understood at all levels/cascaded down, so it can be genuinely lived. So that everyone is able to relate it to their role and feel their contribution.
  - Start by defining an organisation's role in the world, and then define how their people can engage in that
  - The purpose isn't necessarily the explicit *statement* we make about purpose; it might be something to do with the implicit whole of the person or organisation.
  - There are words but there is an intangible element of purpose which drives the collective beyond the purpose itself...being part of a community making things happen...with a will, focus and being part of something bigger
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- What is the intent – is it just a desire to see their people going above and beyond or to boost productivity?
  - Intent may work from the head – valuable to work in the body – purpose is a heartfelt thing. Start people where they are at and move them along. What is their intent, why are they doing it? Openness and curiosity? If it is just because it is the 'latest thing' or to help them with the retention of talent – that is not about purpose.
  - From the organisation's stand point – they tend to focus on being a great place to work. Trying to be a place where people feel included. But that can miss how people want to engage.
  - Quiet quitting trend has led employers to seek to help employees to connect with their purpose
  - Covid and working from home increased the perceived need in organisations to find a connection between organisational and personal purpose. Sitting at home – now what is this about – no emotional connection. No human connection.
  - Creating a safe space where the connection can happen and the value to the organisation is that you can use it in other contexts. Inclusivity. Learning together – this is different to the top down stuff.

- It is fundamentally about mindset - an abundant vs a scarcity mindset
- Even if the conditions are not quite right, I can do the work and something might come of it

### Other comments

Suggestions for future meetings:

- Explicitly explore the different aspects of the work those in the network do for non profits, public and private sector.
- Setting the slaves free... a sense of overwhelm and burn out - how can we align head and heart? Purpose as a place where you can be free to be yourself.
- Practical session – deep dive to explore the tools and approaches people use in their work. Can we use some of them as a group, to increase more awareness/ practical sharing.