

Haute Ecole
« ICHEC – ECAM – ISFSC »



Enseignement supérieur de type long de niveau universitaire

Engaging employees in corporate purpose: what is the role of internal communication?

Case Study: Swiss Life Global Solutions

Mémoire présenté par :

Myriam BAUSTERT

Pour l'obtention du diplôme de :

Master en gestion de l'entreprise

Année académique 2021-2022

Promoteur :

Nathalie STAS

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“I’ve learned that it is incredibly important for employees to understand how they fit into the “big picture” of the business. Take the extra step, whenever possible, of tailoring communications to employees so they can write themselves into the story.

When an employee knows exactly how his or her role within the company impact the bottom line or the mission – the reason the company exists – that employee is more engaged in the business and more excited to come to work every day.

It is one of the secrets to employee engagement.”

*Natalie Albers
Manager, Employee Communications
Best Buy
(Harris, 2012)*

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1. Introduction

1.1. Context

According to Bruce and Jeromin (2020), the days when sales records, market share gains and satisfied shareholders were sufficient corporate goals are numbered. Our value system is changing, and customers, but also investors and employees, care more and more about sustainability, corporate responsibility, and fairness. Contrarily to the first decades of industrialization when companies were seemingly able to market whatever product they invented, it is nowadays the consumer that sets the tone (Bruce & Jeromin, 2020). Companies are now expected to anchor the major issues of our time such as environmental protection, social justice and sustainability into their values. The pursuit of profit alone is increasingly no longer a *raison d'être* (Bruce & Jeromin, 2020). Differently put, the generation of profit is by many not seen as an end in itself anymore. This is where corporate purpose enters the game. Corporate purpose is what gives companies a rationale for existence and a goal to work towards besides the creation of shareholder value.

As many young people, but also more and more midlife career occupants, express the wish to make a positive societal contribution (Imperatori, 2017), the number of companies defining a purpose for themselves is on the rise. Yet, the desire for purpose also raises a whole new set of challenges for companies. Defining a purpose is one thing, but making it come to life is a different one. As explained by Frank (2015), “employees are becoming the ultimate reputation makers or breakers in a world, where [...] the truth is more accessible and shareable than ever – particularly by those on the “inside”” (Frank, 2015). Applied to corporate purpose, this means that when employees are not convinced by a company’s purpose, it is very likely that customers will not believe in it either. And what is the point of defining a purpose when no one believes in it? Or worse, when people suspect that companies are simply moving from green-washing to purpose-washing?

Consequently, engaging employees in corporate purpose seems to be a hot topic in many companies. One of those companies is *Swiss Life Global Solutions* (SLGS), a global insurance business where I interned in internal communication in the summer of 2021 and spring of 2022. In 2018, the company decided to abandon its mission statement in favor of a company purpose. The initiative to adopt this purpose came from the head of communication of the Swiss Life Group. Unfortunately, just because “purpose” is on the agenda of communication managers, it is not necessarily on everyone else’s. Making employees believe in the purpose and making them communicate it to the outside world takes some effort. And as many see internal communication or internal public relations as an important factor in the promotion and the development of employee engagement (Cézanne et al., 2019), some of those efforts must likely be made by internal communication professionals. External communicators create awareness of the company’s purpose among external stakeholders, but someone must also get internal stakeholders on board. The poor results of a German purpose study from the year 2020 showed that out of 1,300 interviewed skilled workers and managers, only 41% were able to spontaneously cite the purpose of the company they work for (Kienbaum, 2020b). Expressed differently, this means that more than half of the employees do not even know their company’s purpose.

For that reason, this thesis tries to evaluate what internal communication practitioners can and should do to promote employees' engagement in a company's purpose or its *raison d'être*. The research question that results from the explained context is thus: "What is the role of internal communication in engaging employees in corporate purpose?". A question that seems to be of importance not only to Swiss Life but potentially to any company that recently decided to adopt a corporate purpose. In the setting of the research question, internal communication is mostly understood as the actions undertaken by internal communication professionals. Yet, as internal communication can also include other forms of communication within an organization, it also initiates the discovery of the roles of other actors in the company. In other words, the research question should allow the discovery of clear action points for internal communication practitioners, but it should also show where the role of the internal communicator ends and where other actors, such as managers or HR professionals, must step in. The overall goal of this thesis is to give companies some ideas on how internal communication can be leveraged to make purpose internalization more successful.

1.2. Methodology

The aforementioned research question gives rise to two hypotheses:

H1: Internal communication can support the internalization of corporate purpose when the purpose is introduced retrospectively.

H2: The way corporate purpose is communicated influences people's engagement in the topic.

The first hypothesis reflects the view that engaging employees in the company's purpose is, in essence, a question of purpose internalization. Even if a company elaborates a purpose that articulates the company's core values and main goals to the public, this does not necessarily mean that this purpose also touches the hearts and minds of the company's employees (Rey & Bastons, 2019). According to Rey and Bastos (2019), the real challenge lies in articulating a higher purpose that makes employees feel proud to be part of the company. An effective purpose is thus one that evokes the "emotional commitment of the employees" (Rey & Bastons, 2019). The process of defining a purpose cannot be about designing a statement that will be printed on organizational documents. It must be about finding a purpose that stays imprinted in the employee's minds (Rey & Bastons, 2019).

Unfortunately, defining and communicating such an "effective purpose" is not evident. Scholars and practitioners have been wondering about the right way to internalize or integrate purpose for quite some time, but the focus has generally not been on internal communication. Consequently, this paper tries to evaluate the specific role of internal communication in "making the purpose come to life", so that it does not remain a sole "marketing statement". The focus hereby lies on companies that introduce the purpose retrospectively for two reasons:

- (1) the companies that have had a purpose since the beginning (purpose-based structures) have less trouble integrating it into the value chain as the value chain was, from the beginning, designed to support the purpose, and
- (2) the company that is examined in the study (Swiss Life Global Solutions), similarly to many other companies, introduced its purpose retrospectively.

The second hypothesis picks up on the emerging current of “engagement as a management practice” that develops as an alternative to the perception of engagement as a mere psychological state (Cézanne et al., 2019). The testing of this hypotheses requires the acceptance of engagement as something that can be triggered and influenced by management practices and not something exclusively intrinsic to people (“creating engagement” vs “being engaged” (Cézanne et al., 2019)). Furthermore, the hypothesis also builds on the assumption that internal communication is an important factor in the development and promotion of employee engagement, which seems to be accepted by many authors (cf. Cézanne et al., 2019). Concretely, the second hypothesis tries to evaluate if there is a way of communicating purpose that makes employees engage in it. Simultaneously, it evaluates the limitations that exist for the engagement of employees through internal communication tools and practices.

The study of the just presented research question and hypotheses requires the review of three theoretical concepts: corporate purpose, employee engagement and internal communication. These concepts are defined and explored from different perspectives to establish potential links between them. For instance, the question of how to engage employees in corporate purpose indirectly implies that the concept of purpose offers something inherently “engaging” to employees. Consequently, it makes sense to study the link between engagement and purpose. Similarly, as the second hypothesis arises from the assumption that internal communication has an influence on employee engagement, it is inevitable to also further study this link. In addition to the theoretical framework that is constructed to explain the three concepts in question, another section examines some theoretical frameworks and practical studies that give first elements for the validation or rejection of the hypotheses.

The insights resulting from the theory are then compared to data collected at Swiss Life Global Solutions. The data in question was collected in four different ways to reduce potential bias. The first two methods provide secondary data arising from internal company documents and internal Employee Engagement and Purpose Perception surveys. Regarding the internal documents, they originate both from Swiss Life Global Solutions (SLGS) and Swiss Life, the parent company. They explain, among other things, the company’s purpose journey and its ongoing cultural transformation. Consequently, they provide essential insights for the understanding of any purpose-related actions that have been undertaken at SLGS. Nevertheless, the documents originating from the mother company are to be used with care. The subsidiary has much freedom in handling its own business, hence there might be discrepancies between the two companies.

The employee engagement and purpose perception surveys were selected as sources not only because they pick up the topics of the research question, but also because they enlarge the number of questioned people. For the collection of primary data, a qualitative method with individual interviews was chosen. While this method best enables the understanding of people’s attitudes and perceptions, it also has one major disadvantage. Namely that the number of people that can be interviewed is, for time management reasons, limited. The internal surveys, which require the participation of all employees, provide data from far more people, and thus nicely complement the collected primary data. Additionally, since the surveys are online and anonymous, employees are potentially less reserved in expressing themselves. In a face-to-face interview, the interviewee might fear judgement by the interviewer and might therefore hold back on certain views.

As touched upon, the primary data was collected through individual interviews. Those interviews were performed between March and May 2022 with internal communication and HR

professionals, as well as with some volunteering employees. Concretely, the interviewed people were Christine Georis, in her function as internal communicator, Alexia Cure and Barbara Kronsteiner as HR professionals, Marie Dreumont and Diane Mersch as marketing professionals and six employees from different departments and with varying levels of seniority, namely Rakesh Dozo, Morgane Gilli, Nadia Ovchinnikova, Constantin Hille, Sindy Stautemas and Elodie Taing. The interviews as such (see APPENDIX 1: Interview Guide) were semi-structured to leave room for spontaneous questions. The thesis will not state which employee gave what answer as some employees requested that their answers remain anonymous. Employee citations will therefore not be followed by a direct reference.

The last method for data collection was the observation method. Observations were performed during the Purpose Workshops that were organized with all employees in summer 2021. The workshops encouraged participants to reflect on the integration of the company purpose in employees' daily work life. As a consequence, they led people to express their opinions about the purpose and its internalization. The observation method could be described as participatory as I, the observer, participated in all workshops. Nevertheless, the participation was not a very active one, but was mostly reduced to writing down and summarizing what other workshop participants had said. The workshop leader was a representative of the human resources department. This is an important detail as it potentially influenced the participants' way of expressing themselves.

Finally, before any attempts are made to validate or reject the hypotheses, the insights from Swiss Life Global Solutions are compared to the purpose internalization methods of the German insurance company Allianz. Allianz, just like Swiss Life, is a globally active financial service provider. Both companies are comparable when it comes to their services and the company structure. To find out how Allianz internally communicates its purpose, I had an interview with Laura Vening and Eva Langemaat, communication specialists at Allianz Benelux. Comparing the communication approach at Swiss Life to one of another, yet similar, company seems to be imperative to get a more objective and less one-sided view on the problem. Comparing theoretical insights to data collected at both Swiss Life Global Solution and Allianz Benelux is what ultimately makes it possible to attempt answering the research question.

2. Theoretical Frame

2.1. Corporate Purpose

As mentioned in the introduction, one of the three concepts that must be explored to answer the research question is the concept of corporate purpose. Depending on the author, “corporate purpose” might sometimes be referred to as “higher purpose”, “raison d’être” or simply “purpose”. As this section is to a large extent based on the book *Corporate Purpose – das Erfolgskonzept der Zukunft* (2020) by the German authors Bruce and Jeromin, the term “corporate purpose” is preferentially being used to refer to the concept. Nevertheless, the other three terms might simultaneously be used, as they, in the context of this thesis, all describe the same idea. In a nutshell, the following section describes what a corporate purpose is, how it differentiates from other concepts such as mission and vision, and why companies even started to talk about purpose in the first place. Additionally, the section also investigates the benefits of adopting a corporate purpose and under which conditions those benefits can be reaped. To describe the different ways in which a purpose can influence a company, the section also explains the three purpose structures: purpose-based structure, purpose-supported differentiation, and purpose-centric transformation. The section contributes to the totality of the thesis as without a clear understanding of the purpose concept, it is difficult to capture how, and especially why, employees need to be engaged in a company’s purpose.

2.1.1. What is corporate purpose?

The definitions of corporate purpose

There are different ways to define “corporate purpose”, however, easily put, purpose can be understood as the answer to the “Why” question, meaning “Why a company does what it does”. As explained by Simon Sinek in the Golden Circle, companies usually have no difficulties describing what they do and how they do it (Sinek, 2009). However, explaining why they do it is often less evident. The understanding of organizational purpose, which was up to that point primarily linked to financial success, was first questioned in the late 1970s (Winter & Germelmann, 2020). Nearly a decade later, Freeman’s stakeholder theory (1984), which shifts the focus from shareholders only to the consideration of all relevant stakeholders, further encouraged a change of mindset.

Shortly after, in 1989, Pascarella and Frohman looked at purpose from a broader perspective and defined the “purpose-driven organization”. For them, the purpose-driven organization “contributes to the values and beliefs of all relevant stakeholders, both within and outside an organization” (Winter & Germelmann, 2020, p.24). The conceptual evolution of purpose then continued with the publication of the book “Corporate Purpose – Why it Matters More than Strategy” by Shankar Basu (1999). This book defines corporate purpose as an organization’s reason for existence, its *raison d’être*, and explains that a corporate purpose is a company’s ultimate priority. This ultimate priority can be represented by one single objective or a set of objectives. However, it is key to understand that the purpose is “the end and not the means to which the end is achieved” (Basu, 1999, p.8).

Additionally, Basu (1999) also addresses the relationship between corporate purpose and corporate survival. If an organization is not able to survive, asking about the purpose of its existence is irrelevant. Consequently, the capacity to survive is the most basic of all purposes and is taken to be a prerequisite. After the prerequisite is achieved, the purpose as such is what gives the survival meaning. From the definition of the purpose, it can be derived that financial performance, while critical to a company's survival, can never be an end objective. Financial objectives such as profit, market share, growth and rates of return enable the achievement of higher non-financial purposes. They are thus a means to the end, not the end as such (Basu, 1999). Or, to use the words of Simon Sinek (2009), profit is a "result", but it does not describe a company's "Why". Looking at purpose from the strategic standpoint, some academics have argued that the sense of purpose is the first component of a company's strategy. The purpose then shapes the business concept, which is the second component of the strategy. The business concept is finally translated into economic objectives, the last strategic component (Basu, 1999).

In accordance with what has been said before, Winter and Germelmann (2020) define purpose as the "overarching, long-term, and never fully achievable reason for an organization to exist" (Winter & Germelmann, 2020, p.23). Management consultant Gurnek Bains defines purpose as "an invigorating sense that goes beyond business success, and which makes people feel that they are improving society as opposed to just servicing a tactical need" (Bruce, 2020, p.22). Bruce and Jeromin (2020) define corporate purpose as the "higher purpose of a company that goes beyond the sole profit orientation"¹. They further emphasize that the purpose brings across a long-term value-creating promise that is directly linked to the company's value creation. The promise can refer to the company's local environment or its global market environment (Bruce & Jeromin, 2020).

So, to sum up, corporate purpose answers the question of why a company exists by describing the added value it creates for its stakeholders. Using the term "stakeholders" rather than "shareholders" implies that purpose goes beyond the sole profit orientation and, in the way that purpose is mostly understood nowadays, the added value is not only created through the fulfillment of a consumer need or want, but also includes a social or environmental dimension. While one might argue that satisfying a customer's need is reason enough for a company to exist, this argument is rapidly losing significance in the face of overconsumption and the seemingly infinite number of existing products (Bruce & Jeromin, 2020). For Bruce and Jeromin (2020), the construct of the needs-oriented differentiation simply cannot provide an answer to the "why" question. The added value must arise from an effort to sustainably address a problem in the long-term, either in the global market or the local environment of people (Bruce & Jeromin, 2020).

The need for corporate purpose

The need for corporate purpose results from a changing economic context. Certainly, because customers' and investors' expectations are shifting, but also because companies (or their employees) reach a new level of development. To explain this phenomenon, Bruce and Jeromin (2020) suggest looking at Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Before anything else, humans strive to satisfy their basic physiological needs. Once those needs are met, they then strive to satisfy their safety and social needs. Lastly, once the aforementioned needs are fulfilled, people move on to the last two levels: esteem and self-actualization. When it now comes to companies and their

¹ translated from German to English

employees, the majority of actors in industrialized countries have already achieved the last level. Whereas high salaries, corner offices and company cars led to high employee satisfaction in the last decades (esteem), young talents increasingly demand a sense of purpose and self-fulfillment potential from their employer (self-actualization) (Bruce & Jeromin, 2020).

However, explaining the wish of making a meaningful contribution with one's labor only through Maslow's need for self-actualization might be too restrictive. According to Bruce and Jeromin (2020), we might nowadays want to add another level to the hierarchy. The authors call this additional need "the need for universality" ("Universalitätsbedürfnis"). The need for universality recognizes the human being's wish to contribute to the common good and explains all human endeavors, whether of private or professional nature. This need then also explains changing customer and investor expectations. According to Bruce and Jeromin (2020), purpose provides orientation and encourages the way towards a meaningful, innovative and profitable organization that is oriented towards the well-being of all (Bruce & Jeromin, 2020). Not every company has to save the world with their product or service, however, by defining a purpose, each company or brand is to recognize that they can make positive contributions that go beyond the benefits of classic market-based performance indicators (Bruce & Jeromin, 2020).

The differences between purpose, vision, mission and corporate social responsibility

As briefly touched upon, the corporate purpose is a component of the company's strategy (Winter & Germelmann, 2020). To enable its operational application, it must be put down in a purpose statement. The purpose statement is a declaration of intent. It is neither the mission nor the vision of the company (Winter & Germelmann, 2020). Other terms to be found in the literature, such as guiding principle, philosophy, credo, motto, or shared value, are also not necessarily equivalent to the concept of purpose. About missions and visions, Basu (1999) notes that if they fail to identify the highest priority and are only meant to shape employee behavior, they could not be used synonymously with corporate purpose. For Winter and Germelman (2020), the purpose complements the vision and mission. If the purpose explains **why** a company exists, the vision defines **what** objectives must be reached to fulfill the company's "raison d'être" and the mission determines **how** those objectives should be met (Winter & Germelmann, 2020).

Bruce and Jeromin (2020) agree with this view on mission and vision. According to them, the **corporate vision** describes the future state that a company wants to achieve in the next five to ten years. It can include and name some elements which allow reaching the state in question, and it is the basis for the deviation of the most important corporate goals and strategies. As it focuses on what a company wants to achieve in the future, it can indeed be seen as the company's "**what**" (Bruce & Jeromin, 2020). For the **mission**, the distinction to purpose seems a bit less clear. Bruce and Jeromin (2020) also describe the mission as the "**how**" of corporate action, however, other authors provide definitions that sound pretty similar to the ones of corporate purpose. For instance, Johnson et al. (2017) state that the mission statement "aims to provide employees and stakeholders with clarity about what the organization is fundamentally there to do" (Johnson et al., 2017, p.7).

To bring clarity to the topic, Croneberger (2020) explains that the vision is the picture, the mission is the road map to get there and the purpose is the feeling that everyone in the company gets when they accomplish what they set out to do (Croneberger, 2020). The mission makes the vision tangible and helps to define the immediate goal. Differently put, it helps to stay focused on the

plan. The purpose, however, can only be found by studying the morals, ethics and beliefs of an organization (Croneberger, 2020). In this understanding of purpose, “purpose” is defined as a “person’s sense and feeling of resolve or determination” and can be found by asking why one does the work they do or why they show up for one company rather than another (Croneberger, 2020). According to Rey et al. (2019), purpose can thus be seen as “the foundation of the mission”. Looking at Tata’s purpose “to improve the quality of life for the communities we serve”, it becomes clear that purpose expresses in a short sentence the positive impact or the legacy which a company aims to leave on this world (Rey, Velasco, et al., 2019, p.4). Google states that their engagement is “to improve the life of as many people as possible” (Google, n.d.). This statement could be seen as their purpose (the “why”). Their mission “to organize the world’s information and make it universally accessible and useful” describes how they want to improve people’s lives.

As in the most common understanding of corporate purpose, a company’s purpose should reflect how that company positively contributes to society, it makes sense to also differentiate corporate purpose from **corporate social responsibility** (CSR). Defining CSR is not an easy task as the concept is rather vague and leaves room for interpretation. In the definition suggested by Kotler and Lee in 2005, corporate social responsibility is described as a “commitment to improve community well-being through discretionary business practices and contributions of corporate resources”(Kraus & Brtitzelmaier, 2012, p.285). For Bruce and Jeromin (2020), corporate purpose goes further than CSR. It is not only an instrument to improve the company’s ecological and social impact but guides all activities of the company. Contrarily to purpose, CSR is neither overarching nor strategic. It rather serves as a reactive communication measure (Winter & Germelmann, 2020) or forms the basis for a department within a company that manages sustainability projects (Bruce & Jeromin, 2020). Corporate purpose is not a department. It is a conviction that guides the whole company in the long term and creates sustainable added value (Bruce & Jeromin, 2020). Social responsibility can be part of the operational application of a company’s purpose, but it is not the purpose per se (Winter & Germelmann, 2020).

To highlight the difference between the two terms and explain the notion of “added value”, Porter and Kramer used the Fair-Trade example in their article “Creating Shared Value”. The idea of Fair-Trade is to increase the share that growers receive by giving them more money for the same quantity of product. While this practice makes sure the created value is distributed in a more socially equitable way, the value as such is not increased. To use the cake metaphor: the cake is distributed more equally, but it does not get bigger. Corporate purpose, on the other hand, aims to shape the entire value chain in a way that enables growers to produce more sustainably and harvest better qualities. Better qualities can be sold at a higher price, and this does increase the size of the proverbial cake. According to research, fairly paid farmers in the Ivory Coast can increase their income by ten to twenty percent. Investments based on a shared values approach lead to income surges of up to three hundred percent (Bruce & Jeromin, 2020).

In short

Corporate purpose can be defined in many ways, however, there seems to be consensus that an organization’s purpose should fundamentally explain why a company “does what it does”. The concept of purpose does not replace corporate missions and visions but rather complements them. The additional value of the purpose lies first and foremost in its directional function, meaning that the purpose guides the totality of a company’s decisions and actions. Furthermore, the notion of

“added value” plays a major role as an organization’s purpose should positively impact its entire value chain and society as a whole.

2.1.2. What corporate purpose structures exist?

When an organization decides to adopt a corporate purpose, it must ask itself how to go about the process. The steps on the way to corporate purpose depend on the starting position, so the context of the organization. According to Bruce and Jeromin (2020), there are essentially three different scenarios:

- Purpose-based structure
- Purpose-supported differentiation
- Purpose-centric transformation

Purpose-based structure

The purpose-based structure describes a scenario in which a company is founded based on a corporate purpose. This scenario supposes the establishment of a completely new offering, either because a new company is founded or because a new brand is introduced within an existing brand portfolio. In this scenario, the company or brand is usually entering a mature market in which they potentially create a new market segment. As the market is characterized by strong dependencies on environmental factors, the company’s purpose should address relevant environmental factors. This enables to link the business model and the value chain to the purpose. If the new company or brand manages to pursue a purpose that none of the existing players is already pursuing, this scenario is especially promising in terms of competitiveness (Bruce & Jeromin, 2020).

The company *Method* serves as an example to illustrate this scenario. When *Method* was founded in 2001, the company producing cleaning products was confronted with the challenge of entering a mature market. Yet, *Method* was able to establish itself in a relatively short period via the purpose “happy four walls”. The company promised its customers a happy, healthy, and clean home without negative side effects and translated this into several measures. The entire value chain was set up and optimized in line with the purpose: from environmentally friendly sourcing to controlled manufacturing processes and packaging made from recycled plastic. The company was successful precisely because of its purpose. The purpose was, so to say, the essential part of the business idea (Bruce & Jeromin, 2020).

Purpose-supported differentiation

The purpose-supported differentiation refers to already established companies and has a high practical relevance as it is the most common scenario among companies. In this scenario, the market environment is characterized by a mature market, increasing competitive pressure and high comparability of products. Differentiation via classic functional or emotional benefits might be difficult to achieve or unique selling propositions might be easy to copy in a short period of time. Additionally, the appearance of new players with innovative offerings or business models might further challenge established players. Differentiation can then be achieved by actively pursuing a suitable and relevant purpose and implementing selected corporate activities such as communication campaigns (Bruce & Jeromin, 2020).

The example of *Gillette*, the *Procter & Gambler* brand producing men's razors and shaving products, can be used to illustrate purpose-supported differentiation. After losing market shares to both cheaper brands and those that work with more innovative subscription-based models, Gillette decided to pursue a purpose of societal value to stand out from the competition. In the context of the "Me too" movement, the company changed its slogan to address the image of masculinity in society. The slogan "The Best a Man Can Get" developed into "The Best Men Can Be". Communication activities centered around contrasting the traditional masculinity stereotypes with what *Gillette* believes to be the preferred behavior of men today. Those campaigns found approval among many, but also faced backlash from men who felt patronized and expressed the intention to switch to other brands. It should be noted that, in the purpose-supported differentiation, the creation of social value has direct effects on the company's competitiveness in the market (Bruce & Jeromin, 2020).

Purpose-centric transformation

The third and last scenario, purpose-centric transformation, describes a scenario in which the corporate purpose is the driving force for profound change within the company. The need for transformation hereby results from changing market factors. Examples could be the rising importance of ecological aspects, digitalization or changing societal values. It is assumed that, if the company does not initiate change, the combined effect of the changing market factors has the potential to significantly reduce the company's competitiveness or even threaten its existence. In a purpose-centric transformation, the company specifically addresses the market factors and realigns its business model and value chain. This can understandably have far-reaching impacts on all corporate activities. To describe the market environment in which this scenario arises, the following characteristics can be named: a mature market, high pressure from external factors and established business models and value chains (Bruce & Jeromin, 2020).

The case of *Philip Morris International* can be used to further explain the scenario. As a tobacco company, *Philip Morris* is facing considerable pressure from external stakeholders. On the one hand, due to a worldwide declining acceptance of tobacco products and, on the other hand, due to changing legislation that has restrictive effects on the business. The company thus decided to take the radical step of moving away from the core business of tobacco cigarettes. Under the purpose of "delivering a smoke-free future", the company wants to move on to products containing less harmful substances. According to the company, eliminating combustion from nicotine-containing products can significantly reduce their toxicity (PMI - Philip Morris International, n.d.). The company therefore now mostly focuses on electronic tobacco heaters under the brand IQOS. Former top brands such as Marlboro do not receive marketing support anymore. However, the transformation is not only limited to marketing aspects. To be successful in the electronic tobacco heater market, the company must build new competencies. They must transform into a tech company, build up customer service and acquire digital competencies. In this case, the corporate purpose, which also positively contributes to the development of society, is the main driver for a successful business transformation. This business transformation enables the company to stay competitive in the long haul (Bruce & Jeromin, 2020).

In short

A company that has a purpose is not necessarily a purpose-driven organization. There are three different purpose structures. The applicable structure depends on the company's context and influences the way purpose is introduced and lived within the organization. For the purpose-based structure, meaning the company directly founded with a purpose, aligning the business model to the purpose is relatively easy as the purpose and the value chain are designed in coordination with each other. For companies that retrospectively adopt a purpose, aligning business model and purpose might be more challenging. In the purpose-supported differentiation, the main goal is to gain a competitive advantage. Therefore, this model can be seen as a lighter version of becoming purpose-driven. The purpose-centric transformation is much more disruptive. It mostly forces companies to change their (entire) business model.

2.1.3. Why do companies engage in corporate purpose?

If companies engage in corporate purpose, it is because the introduction of a purpose is said to come with numerous advantages. As already mentioned, the economic landscape is changing and, with the shareholder value approach having become the epitome of short-term profit maximization and a lack of sustainability (Bruce & Jeromin, 2020), companies need something else that guides their way. This guidance can be found within the corporate purpose. For proponents of the concept, corporate purpose is not only a way of fulfilling customers', investors' and employees' sustainability expectations. They firmly believe in the direct link between corporate purpose and more classic corporate goals, in other terms, profit generation.

The three dimensions influenced by corporate purpose

The pursuit of a corporate purpose is generally accompanied by considerable investments and an extensive amount of personal commitment (Bruce & Jeromin, 2020). Yet, many believe the venture to be worth the effort. According to Bruce and Jeromin (2020), the effects of corporate purpose can be described based on three dimensions: added value, people and market.

- The first dimension, **added value**, refers to the positive impacts of corporate purpose on the market environment and external stakeholders. Mentioned positive impacts can be of social, ecological or societal nature (Bruce & Jeromin, 2020). Understandably, these benefits only appear when the purpose was designed in such a way. For purposes such as Patagonia's ("Patagonia is in business to save our home planet" (Sonsev, 2019)), the potential added value for stakeholders is obvious but companies must also "walk the talk". Once the purpose is engrained into the business, advantages start to show.

According to a Deloitte survey from the year 2014, eighty-one percent of respondents who work for a company with a strong sense of purpose believe that relevant external stakeholders trust the leadership team. For companies with a weak sense of purpose, the percentage only lies at fifty-four percent (Deloitte, 2014). Similarly, companies with a strong sense of purpose are more often believed to be helpful "Corporate Citizens" than companies with a weak sense of purpose (Bruce & Jeromin, 2020).

By pursuing a purpose beyond profit, companies might also be able to benefit from financial or infrastructural support, namely when they pursue the same goals as local policymakers (Bruce & Jeromin, 2020). Additionally, the corporate purpose can have a positive impact on investments. On the one hand, the number of investors making their choices based on social or sustainable criteria is growing. And on the other hand, focusing on purpose rather than profits builds business confidence and consequently drives investments (Deloitte, 2014). Yet, there is no (or little) hard evidence that social purpose invariably improves the bottom line.

- The second dimension, **people**, refers to employees. Attracting and retaining the right people is an immense challenge for companies and one of utmost importance. When it comes to recruitment, a clearly defined purpose can be helpful in both ways: candidates can evaluate if the company's values are in line with their own and recruiters can assess whether the candidate's motivations match with the company's expectations. This can, on the one hand, reduce recruitment costs and, on the other hand, increase the likelihood of longer working relationships (Bruce & Jeromin, 2020). It is important to highlight in this context that the relation between purpose and employees is a reciprocal one. On the one hand, the purpose attracts people and motivates them. On the other hand, the right employees are also the ones who make the successful pursuit of the higher corporate purpose possible in the first place (Bruce & Jeromin, 2020).

Other factors positively impacted by purpose are job satisfaction, engagement and loyalty (Bruce & Jeromin, 2020). There is little satisfaction to be found in going to work every morning to maximize the shareholder value of a few anonymous stockholders. Working for a purpose one believes in is certainly much more engaging. In a Calling Brands study, sixty-five percent of respondents indicated that they would be willing to go the extra mile for a company with a purpose (Bruce & Jeromin, 2020). According to McKinsey, employees expect their job to bring purpose into their lives. If employers are not able to deliver on this expectation, they should be prepared to lose talent to companies that are (Dhingra et al., n.d.). Lastly, as the corporate purpose has a directional function, it does not only bear positive effects for new joiners and employees but also simplifies decision-making for management (Bruce & Jeromin, 2020). In today's fast-paced world, companies often feel pressured to follow every new trend to always be "up-to-date". In such situations, the purpose can help to stay focused. This saves time, energy and resources (Bruce & Jeromin, 2020).

- The third dimension, **market**, refers to customers and competitiveness. For this dimension, the company's challenge is to convince consumers of its product and to develop customer loyalty in the long run. Corporate purpose can be helpful in both cases, among other things because it offers opportunities for differentiation (Bruce & Jeromin, 2020). According to Accenture, sixty-two percent of consumers want companies to stand up for the issues they are passionate about and sixty-six percent think that transparency is a brand's most attractive quality (Barton et al., 2018).

Sonsev (2019) even suggests that purpose has become the fifth "P" of marketing (Product, Price, Place and Promotion) (Sonsev, 2019). A large-scale survey analyzing purchasing behavior in the United States discovered that the probability of buying a new product or service is one-third higher if it is produced by a purpose-driven company. The probability of switching brands is even fifty percent higher (Bruce & Jeromin, 2020).

In short

From attracting the right talents to retaining customers and encouraging growth, the positive effects of corporate purpose can be far-reaching. According to Ellsworth (2002), corporate purpose can be both source of stability and impetus to proactive change. Companies are forced to change quickly to stay competitive but must also provide people with enough continuity and consistency to make sure they do not feel overwhelmed. Purpose can simultaneously provide stability – by keeping everyone focused on the core values – and continuously encourage change – as the purpose is never fully realized (Ellsworth, 2002). Nevertheless, as will be explained shortly, there is no guarantee that companies automatically benefit from all the advantages linked to purpose once they decide on one.

2.1.4. Under which conditions can the benefits of corporate purpose be reaped?

Even though there are, in theory, many benefits which can arise from the adoption of a corporate purpose, not everyone believes that companies and their stakeholders can “de facto” reap those benefits. For critics of the concept, corporate purpose is just a “marketing buzzword” or an “intelligent sales argument” but not a real win-win situation for companies and customers (Winter & Germelmann, 2020). According to Winter and Germelmann (2020), the economic crisis resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic provided a foundation to pick up discussions about the role of corporate purpose. Critics of the movement called for its end and the return to financial indicators as the primary decision-making tool. Advocates, on the other side, pointed out that purpose is relevant, especially in times of crisis and uncertainty, and that it is not just a nice-to-have in times of plenty. The assumption behind the claim: in times of crisis, it is even easier to sort out the “good from the bad” and identify those organizations that actually support their stakeholders (Winter & Germelmann, 2020).

On the one hand, the Covid-19 pandemic has taught companies what stakeholders care about, and on the other hand, it has forced companies to show creativity and agility in adapting to the “new normal”. Consequently, the pandemic has both highlighted the significance of purpose and demonstrated the ambiguities in its interpretation and application (Winter & Germelmann, 2020). According to Bruce and Jeromin (2020), even though many companies have announced a purpose, upon closer inspection it quickly becomes clear that most statements are not linked to the corporate strategy. Companies in which the defined purpose is not reflected in the way they create value or attract talents, cannot profit from the benefits of corporate purpose (Bruce & Jeromin, 2020).

A purpose, which is not significant, not authentic, not profitable, and not seriously implemented is, according to Bruce and Jeromin (2020), indeed only to be seen as a marketing statement.

- “Not significant” means that the purpose does not contribute to the resolution of a social problem.
- “Not authentic” describes a purpose that has not evolved from the core values of the company, and that is not used as a guideline to make major corporate decisions.
- “Not profitable” is a purpose that has no measurable value for the company.

- “Not seriously implemented” is a purpose when the success of executives and senior managers is not measured by their contribution to achieving said purpose (Bruce & Jeromin, 2020).

To understand these points, one must look at the definition of corporate purpose as understood by Bruce and Jeromin (2020). For them, a purpose can only be a real purpose if it has demonstrable positive effects or reduces negative effects on the market environment. However, this does not mean that a company that, for instance, donates money to build schools in Africa automatically has a corporate purpose. When the donation does not contribute to the value creation process of the company, it is merely an expenditure that reduces the result. A purpose always has reciprocal effects, it is not a “good deed” (Bruce & Jeromin, 2020).

The success of a corporate purpose is thus essentially dependent on two variables:

- 1) How the purpose was developed (does it result from what the world demands of the company and does it represent the company’s values) and
- 2) How serious a company is about “making it come to life”.

The framework of higher purpose (as explained by Winter and Germelmann):

To help companies in the development of a purpose, Winter and Germelmann (2020) propose a framework, called the framework of higher purpose. According to this framework, a company must, before developing a purpose, consider all internal and external **stakeholders** and determine which ones are most relevant to them. Next, the company should select one or several **reference points** within the organization. Reference points are the touchpoints through which stakeholders encounter the company’s purpose. Reference points can be the higher-level organization, the company as a whole or individual brands within the company. All reference points should be identified to finally choose those that add value to the previously selected stakeholders. While a product brand constitutes a better reference point for customers, the corporate brand is more central to most other stakeholders. In companies with a large brand portfolio, stakeholders might be addressed by more than one reference point of the same organization. This adds complexity. To create consistency, it makes sense to let each product brand be its own reference point but subordinate all reference points to the group (Winter & Germelmann, 2020).

The **topic** of higher purpose depends on the relevant stakeholders’ values and beliefs. When people identify with an organization, this leads to stronger relationships and loyalty toward the reference points. As a company’s *raison d’être* should only consist of one higher purpose, the chosen topic should be broad and overarching enough that it can be interpreted in different ways for potential subordinated brands. *Unilever*’s purpose of “making sustainable living commonplace” leaves enough room for individual interpretation. The *Unilever* brand *Dove*, for instance, sees its purpose in promoting its female consumer’s self-esteem to initiate sustainable social change. All three dimensions, stakeholder(s), reference point(s) and topic must, in any case, be perceived as relevant and authentic. Authenticity is mainly achieved through consistency. If an organization’s purpose is uncoupled from its conceptual positioning, consistency is lost and the company faces risks of an authenticity gap and accusations of purpose-washing (Winter & Germelmann, 2020).

The challenging part about formulating a purpose is to make it (1) specific enough so that people can identify with it, (2) broad enough for it to be adaptable to market dynamics and (3) open enough to allow for co-creation with relevant stakeholders (Winter & Germelmann, 2020). If organizations follow the framework, they should be able to build high levels of trust, credibility and loyalty (Winter & Germelmann, 2020) and thus reap the benefits of corporate purpose. Nevertheless, companies must stay attentive toward the context. During times of external crisis and uncertainty, a higher purpose might gain in perceived relevance. Yet, this gain in perceived relevance does not necessarily lead to a gain in perceived authenticity. If the purpose becomes inconsistent in the face of a too dominating context, for instance, because the company cannot demonstrate real impact, it risks losing authenticity. This can then quickly lead to accusations of purpose-washing (Winter & Germelmann, 2020). Especially those companies that retrospectively join the movement have a high risk of purpose-washing. If brands have already established themselves without a meaningful promise, revising entire systems and strategies through the lens of purpose is extremely difficult (Goleman, n.d.), yet necessary to make the purpose credible.

In short

Not every company which decides to adopt a purpose will automatically benefit from the advantages linked to corporate purpose. If companies use corporate purpose as a mere marketing strategy, they will, at best, reap the benefits usually linked to marketing tactics. At worst, the so-called “purpose” could even bring companies into serious trouble. Namely, when customers notice that the company’s promise is an empty one. Customers are becoming increasingly skeptical when it comes to corporate statements and in principle, it is not far from greenwashing to purpose-washing (Bruce & Jeromin, 2020). A superficial rebranding exercise is thus not enough. To capture the real value of purpose, companies have to make a genuine effort to define, and redefine, what it is that makes the organization tick (Almandoz et al., 2018). Besides developing a purpose that matches market demands and the company’s core business, it is thus key for organizations to live its purpose internally. To achieve that, companies must engage their employees in the purpose and start analyzing every process and every decision through the purpose lens. As employee engagement seems to be a key factor in successfully implementing a corporate purpose, the next section specifically focuses on that topic.

2.2. Employee Engagement

According to Scott-Jackson and Mayo (2018), the continued interest in engagement since the 1990s reflects the changing perception of management/worker relations and the gradual disappearance of traditional hierarchical management structures (Scott-Jackson & Mayo, 2018). In the “modern organization” characterized by flat hierarchical structures and the informality of relationships between management and workers, workers do not simply follow their manager’s instructions. They are, to a large extent, self-managed. This requires greater personal investment and motivation by the individual. Personal investment is also required in the context of corporate purposes. No one can be forced to believe in something, but if a purpose is compelling, people can find a way to connect to it and be inspired by it. However, to understand how corporations can encourage the engagement of their employees in the company purpose, one must first understand what the concept of engagement even entails. This section provides definitions of employee engagement and studies why engagement matters and how it can be achieved. Additionally, as the relationship between engagement and purpose seems to go both ways (purpose requires engagement but can also lead to engagement), the link between the two will be further studied in the last part of this section.

2.2.1. What is employee engagement?

The definitions of employee engagement

According to Imperatori (2017), the concept of employee engagement describes an idea that is more powerful than, yet related to, the “older” management issues of job satisfaction, motivation, and commitment (Imperatori, 2017). Employee or people engagement is hereby understood as a desirable condition with potential positive outcomes for the organization (Imperatori, 2017). The term “employee engagement” was introduced in the 1990s by the Gallup Organization and has since then been the center of many scientific publications (Schönebeck, 2016). Additionally, many private consultancy companies have developed their own concepts around employee engagement. Consequently, many different definitions of employee engagement exist in the literature, and there is little consensus about the “right way” to define the term (Schönebeck, 2016).

In general, engagement could be analyzed from three different perspectives: everyday use, business use, and use in academic or psychological contexts. In everyday life, the concept of engagement refers to involvement, commitment, passion, enthusiasm, focused effort and energy (Schönebeck, 2016). In the business context, employee engagement usually describes the emotional commitment of employees towards the organization they are working for. Emotional commitment means that the employees care about their work. They do not only work to get paid but also try to do their job well so that the company achieves its goals (Schönebeck, 2016). In the academic context, engagement has been looked at from different angles. For some, employee engagement is a set of behaviors (extra-role behavior, adaptive behavior, task- and contextual performance). For others, it is a cognitive, emotional, and physical state (vigor, energy, absorption). Often, it is also considered in relation to job attitudes (job satisfaction, commitment and involvement) and personal traits (proactivity and conscientiousness), but employee engagement as such is neither an attitude nor a character trait (Imperatori, 2017).

Fundamental in the research around engagement was the definition provided by Kahn (1990), who defines personal engagement as the state in which employees identify with their work role. The opposite of personal engagement, personal disengagement, describes the uncoupling of people from their work roles. When people are disengaged, they withdraw and defend themselves physically, cognitively and emotionally during role performances (Kahn, 1990). According to Saks (2006), Kahn's view on engagement thus translates into "being psychologically present when occupying and performing an organizational role" (Saks, 2006, p.601). In Saks' (2006) own definition, engagement is a "distinct and unique construct that consists of cognitive, emotional and behavioral components that are associated with individual role performance" (Saks, 2006, p.602). Yet another definition is provided by Maslach et al. (2001) who describe employee engagement as "a persistent, positive affective-motivational state of fulfillment in employees that is characterized by high levels of activation and pleasure" (Imperatori, 2017).

The delimitation of engagement

Many terms such as intrinsic motivation, identification with work, job involvement, organizational citizenship, organizational commitment and affective attachment to work, have been used as synonyms for employee engagement (Schönebeck, 2016). Yet, those terms should be used with care when the goal is to represent the concept of employee engagement. Engagement is related to many constructs in organizational behavior, but that does not mean that all those constructs are equal. For instance, according to Saks (2006), organizational commitment differs from engagement in that it refers to a person's attitude towards the organization. As previously mentioned, employee engagement is not an attitude. It is the degree to which a person is attentive and absorbed in the performance of their role (Saks, 2006). Job satisfaction and involvement also connote attitude. And while attitude influences the amount of energy and passion that people experience at work, it does not fully explain the intention to activate people's own selves in their job roles (Imperatori, 2017).

Also, even though some research emphasizes the relationship between engagement and personality traits such as conscientiousness, proactivity and extraversion, engagement is not per se a personality trait (Imperatori, 2017). Personality traits affect the energy and passion that people dedicate to their jobs and some studies even confirm the partial overlap between conscientiousness and engagement (Imperatori, 2017). Yet, as for other traits, such as neuroticism and extraversion, such relationships are not categorical, engagement should not be seen as a personality trait. Personality can certainly affect engagement, but research suggests that everyone, independently of their personality, has the potential to engage (Imperatori, 2017). This is an important finding for the study of factors that lead to engagement. If engagement was purely linked to people's personality types, there would be no use in trying to find out by what means people can be engaged.

Another question that comes up when defining engagement is whether engagement is a behavior. Many definitions of engagement conceive it as directly observable behaviors and performance in the work context (Imperatori, 2017). However, different studies demonstrate that behaviors such as organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) and pro-social behaviors are in fact not engagement, but the outcome of engagement (Saks, 2006). Consequently, engagement positively impacts work-related behavior, but cannot be conceived as the behavior itself (Imperatori, 2017). So, if engagement is neither an attitude nor a personality trait or behavior, it must be a state. And indeed,

there seems to be consensus that engagement is a state, connoting high levels of involvement in work and in the organization as well as affective energy (Imperator, 2017).

Personal engagement, work engagement, job and organization engagement

When studying the construct of engagement, chances are that one does not only encounter the term employee engagement but also various other, yet similar, terms. Personal engagement is the term used by Kahn in his writings. Kahn argues that the authentic expression of the self that occurs during engagement is psychologically beneficial to the individual. Therefore, he sees engagement as something that satisfies a personal need (Imperator, 2017). The term work engagement is mostly used in research approaches that view engagement in relation to burnout, or rather engagement as the opposite of burnout. While burnout means exhaustion or fatigue, cynicism or indifference, and lack of accomplishment or professional efficacy, engagement is associated with the three opposite dimensions (energy, involvement and efficacy). Yet, research has shown that burnout and engagement have different antecedents and different possible consequences (Imperator, 2017).

The job and organization engagement approach is associated with Saks' (2006) studies. Saks (2006) proposes an engagement conceptualization that separately studies engagement in a particular job role and a particular organization. Saks demonstrates that although job engagement and organization engagement are related, they are still distinct constructs. As antecedents and consequences of job and organization engagement differ in several ways, psychological conditions that lead to job and organization engagement also differ (Imperator, 2017).

In short

Even though, there are different ways to understand the construct of employee engagement, most academics agree that

- (1) engagement is a physical (energy, vigor), emotional (enthusiasm, passion) and cognitive state (mindfulness, alertness) that employees may experience at work
- (2) the term is distinct from other constructs of organizational behavior
- (3) engagement should not be confused with its determinants (such as personal traits) and its outcomes (such as job attitudes and in-role and extra-role behaviors) (Imperator, 2017).

Globally speaking, engaged employees are in a state of mind characterized by energy, involvement, efficacy, attention and absorption (Imperator, 2017). If the research question of this thesis was formulated using the terms “engaging employees” rather than “involving” them or having them “commit” towards the corporate purpose, it is because purpose does not only impact people's attitude towards the organization, but should also lead to people's “activation of their own selves” (Imperator, 2017) in their job role.

2.2.2. Why does employee engagement matter?

According to Fabi et al. (2009), employee engagement matters because a decrease in engagement can adversely affect the future development of a company. This is the case for at least two reasons. Firstly, engagement with the organization is an important lever for employee retention, and secondly, employee retention and loyalty have positive impacts on organizational productivity

and performance (Fabi et al., 2009). Research proves the link between employee engagement and significant outputs both from the employee's and the organization's perspective (Imperator, 2017).

Engagement outcomes from the employee's perspective

From the employee's perspective, employee engagement can facilitate the pursuit of important personal goals and broaden people's scope of attention. Additionally, in consistence with the view that engagement is the opposite of burnout, engagement can increase well-being and psychological health. Engagement would thus lead to lower levels of anxiety and stress and high levels of mental resilience (Imperator, 2017). Engaged employees are usually happier than disengaged ones. Nevertheless, engagement outcomes can also be detrimental for employees, namely if engagement levels are too high. Being too engaged could lead to emotional exhaustion, workaholism and a work-life imbalance (Imperator, 2017).

Engagement outcomes from the organization's perspective

From the perspective of the organization, engaged employees entail many positive outcomes. Generally speaking, these outcomes relate to employee behavior, positive job attitude, team effectiveness and the overall performance of the organization (Imperator, 2017). As mentioned before, engaged employees are often healthier than non-engaged ones. This comes with benefits not only for the individual but also for the organization. It implies less medically-related absenteeism and suggests greater levels of energy expended in work activities (Imperator, 2017). In addition to being less physically absent, engaged employees also express their intention to remain with the organization for a longer time and have fewer accidents on the job. Research suggests that engaged individuals score higher on customer satisfaction-rating scales, customer helpfulness/ courtesy and work dedication. They show higher levels of active learning, extra-role behaviors and extra discretionary or voluntary efforts, meaning that they do more than the minimum work required (Imperator, 2017).

There are, however, differences in outcomes for job engagement and organizational engagement. Only organizational engagement predicts job satisfaction while both job and organizational engagement predict affective commitment, active learning and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) (Imperator, 2017). Studies conducted by consultancy firms have also found that organizational engagement predicts many key performance indicators such as profitability, earnings per share, operating margin, net profit margin and organizational climate. According to Imperator (2017), those findings are however to be taken with caution as scientific rigor is not guaranteed. Overall, it is still safe to say that engagement leads to better productivity and better individual task performance (Imperator, 2017).

Same as for the employee, there are also possible negative effects of engagement to note for the organization. The drawbacks of engagement can be classified into four categories (Imperator, 2017):

➤ *Unrealistic expectations*

While measuring engagement levels within organizations (e.g., through internal surveys) can positively impact the work climate, it can also create expectations among workers. If those expectations are not properly managed, they can lead to opposite effects resulting in job frustration and job dissatisfaction (Imperator, 2017).

- *U-shape relationship between people engagement and performance*
Employee performance is lower for unengaged employees than for engaged ones. Yet, as too much engagement can lead to emotional exhaustion, workaholism and a work-life imbalance, it is very likely that in the case of over-engagement, the impact of engagement on performance is also negative. The relationship between engagement and performance is thus not linear, but U-shaped (Imperator, 2017).
- *Feelings of manipulation and breach of psychological contract*
Employees could perceive the organization's engagement efforts as a way of manipulating them into exhausting their energy for the economic profit of the company. This risk is related to the organization's perceived credibility in the employee-organization relationship. If employees do not feel like their employer genuinely cares about them, they may feel betrayed and exploited (Imperator, 2017).
- *Engagement as managerial rhetoric*
The risk of engagement as managerial rhetoric results from the development of the "engagement industry". Consultancy firms heavily push the engagement rhetoric in their markets, but when organizations perceive engagement merely as a way of dealing with environmental requirements, and not a way to better manage people, the return on investment is poor. The engagement rhetoric leads to frustration among employees and the organization loses trustworthiness and credibility due to the gap between "what is said" and "what is done" (Imperator, 2017).

In short

Scientific research confirms positive outcomes of employee engagement both as a source of employee well-being and business success. This leads to a win-win situation for the employee and the organization. However, further research is needed to align scientific findings with practical relevance and confirm consultancy firm studies. Additionally, one should remember that engagement is not always positive and that it can bear risks both for the organization and the individual (Imperator, 2017). Putting things into perspective with corporate purpose, it can be assumed that the engagement of employees in the company's purpose has the same benefits usually linked to organizational and job engagement. When employees believe in their company's purpose, it can be a source of well-being to them as they do not feel like they are acting in contradiction to their personal values. Moreover, when employees stand by the purpose with heart and soul, external stakeholders are much more likely to believe in its truthfulness too. This can translate into business success for the organization. Nevertheless, Imperator (2017)'s insights also show that companies should not overdo their attempts in engaging employees in corporate purpose as this could lead to unrealistic expectations, feelings of manipulation or exhaustion (Imperator, 2017).

2.2.3. How is employee engagement achieved?

Knowing the benefits of employee engagement, the next relevant question is to determine how employee engagement can be achieved. To answer this question, one must study the antecedents of engagement. At the organizational level, perceived supervisor support, collaborative organizational climate, rewards and recognition, job role, and leadership styles all positively impact engagement. At the individual level, engagement is influenced by the individual's personality and experiences, including their competence, self-determination, self-reliance, a sense

of personal accomplishment and the inclination to do something for one's own sake rather than for specific rewards (Imperator, 2017). Engagement research distinguishes five levels of engagement antecedents: job characteristics, interpersonal relationships, personal features, HRM practices and organization solutions (Imperator, 2017).

- **Job antecedents** characterize the social context of the job design. Examples are innovative tasks, job enrichment, job-role clarity, meaningful work, and the level of task challenge. Work pressure and control are also classified as job antecedents, but they influence engagement negatively.
- **Interpersonal antecedents** characterize the social context. Supervisor support, positive appreciation, collaborative climate, manager expectations and manager self-efficacy fall into this category.
- **Personal antecedents** are personal characteristics including skills and personal traits (coping skills, competencies, self-determination, dispositional optimism, ...). For personal traits, research suggests a positive relationship between engagement and openness and engagement and extroversion. Proactive and autotelic personalities, as well as conscientiousness and positive affect, are also seen as engagement antecedents. Other authors furthermore show the relationship between engagement and curiosity, optimism, self-efficacy, self-esteem, perceptions of the self and coping style. Yet, as already established, everyone can be engaged regardless of the personality once the right levers are found. Some people are just more predisposed to show high levels of engagement (Imperator, 2017).
- **HRM practices antecedents** characterize the organizational mechanisms. Examples in this category are reward and recognition practices, career opportunities, job security, coaching, training and performance management as well as practices that enhance employee voice and work-life balance (Imperator, 2017).

In their study, Fabi et al. (2009), group these practices according to the following ten themes: work-life balance, leadership, communication and participation, performance evaluation, selection, induction and integration, training and development, compensation, benefits and finally, work organization and job characteristics. These themes form the “best practices” basis, but how the corresponding HRM practices are implemented and the intensity with which they are applied varies from one organization to another (Fabi et al., 2009). The three themes having the strongest impact on engagement are (1) work organization and job characteristics, (2) training and development, and (3) selection. The practices belonging to the other seven themes only influence engagement indirectly through job satisfaction.

- **Organization level antecedents** characterize the organization solution, both factual and perceived. Examples are perceived organizational support, positive climate, procedural justice, supportive leadership style, perception of workplace safety, supportive organizational culture and corporate social responsibility (Imperator, 2017).

Besides the presence of engagement antecedents, research also demonstrates the relevance of three significant ingredients: meaningfulness, safety and resource availability.

- Meaningfulness relates to people's desire to activate themselves in meaningful activities. Differently put, people need a **purpose** to be engaged.

- Safety describes the need to feel secure in one's environment. It translates into **empowerment** to act and react.
- Resource availability means that employees must have access to both resources and **mastery** that allow them to engage in the intended activities (Imperator, 2017).

Meaningfulness, safety and resource availability highlight the importance of cultural values and frames, HRM practices and management, and leadership styles and behaviors. Cultural values and frames provide sense and enable employees to interpret their work experiences and employment relationships in relation to their job and the organization. HRM practices contribute to the development of a fair work environment and balanced employment relationships. Management and leadership styles and behaviors translate into organizational processes that intermediate the relationship between employees and the organization. They contribute to providing sense and reinforce (or destroy) a trustworthy organizational environment (Imperator, 2017).

In short

There is no universal recipe for employee engagement, only various types of antecedents. By combining those and applying different strategies and methods, organizations can create employee engagement cultures that work for them (Imperator, 2017). Important to note is that employee engagement is a long-term and ongoing process that requires continued interactions over time (Saks, 2006). It is not a point of arrival, but a dynamic condition that can vary over time (Imperator, 2017). The process of engaging employees is thus a never-ending one. Interesting to note for the concept of corporate purpose is that meaningfulness (or purpose) is in itself understood as an engagement antecedent. This supports the view that, while purpose requires engagement, it also leads to engagement, a relation that is further studied below. Furthermore, the study of the engagement antecedents shows that employees can only be engaged in a purpose if the corporate culture allows for it. Engagement is created through the right interplay of job and organization characteristics, interpersonal relationships, HRM practices and personal traits.

2.2.4. How does employee engagement relate to corporate purpose?

From what has been established so far, it becomes evident that the relationship between engagement and purpose is reciprocal. On the one hand, a sense of purpose leads to higher levels of engagement, but, on the other hand, engaged employees are also what makes the pursuit of a higher corporate purpose possible in the first place. As already stated, meaningfulness, which is achieved through a sense of purpose, is one of the three significant ingredients to employee engagement. Consequently, to have engaged employees, employers need to make sure employees can find meaning in their work. For Kahn (1990), psychological meaningfulness is "a feeling that one is receiving a return on investments of one's self in a currency of physical, cognitive or emotional energy" (Kahn, 1990, p.704). People experience such meaningfulness when they feel worthwhile, useful and valuable (Kahn, 1990). A lack of meaningfulness arises when people feel that little is expected of them and that there is little opportunity for them to give or receive in work role performances (Kahn, 1990).

Research shows that individuals are more likely to experience a sense of meaning if they perceive their role to be in alignment with their self-concept (Imperator, 2017). Meaningfulness can thus be enhanced through factors that connect the employees to their work. Connection is created when the jobs are appropriately enriched, employees feel related to their colleagues and there is a good person-job fit (Imperator, 2017). To achieve a good person-job fit or enrich a job in a way that it creates meaning, employees should be able to align their individual purpose to the organization's purpose. Individual (or personal) purpose can be defined as the overarching sense of what matters in someone's life (Dhingra et al., 2020). According to Dhingra et al. (2020), people who say they are "living their purpose" at work are, compared to those who say they are not, four times more likely to report high engagement levels. This is because purpose contributes to employee experience which in turn is linked to employee engagement, organizational commitment and increased feelings of well-being (Dhingra et al., 2020).

For Rey, Velasco et al. (2019), the "fulfillment of personal purpose within organizational purpose is the essence of truly purpose-driven organizations" (Rey, Velasco et al., 2019, p.4). As purpose-driven organizations are generally admired, many companies have tried to transfer the "good practices" to their own organization. However, according to Rey, Velasco et al. (2019), this endeavor often fails as purpose-driven organizations have been analyzed under the wrong management logic. Most companies are embedded in the *neoclassical logic of management* which defines work in terms of tasks, competences, and objectives. Differently put, as long as people do their job, it does not matter why they do it. Purpose-driven organizations however require a *postindustrial management logic*, called the new *management logic of purpose* by Rey, Velasco et al. (2019). In this logic, the meaning of work is something of immense value for the employee. Concretely the new logic of purpose is characterized by three traits:

- (1) Personal purpose – the idea of individual purpose in the organizational context
- (2) Self-management – the context in which personal purpose flourishes within the organization
- (3) Unity – the state in which personal and organizational purpose are connected (Rey, Velasco et al., 2019).

Even though many people have not identified or articulated their purpose, upon closer inspection, it becomes clear that most people still have an underlying individual purpose (Dhingra et al., 2020). To help people to better identify and articulate that purpose, organization should encourage conversations about purpose, meaning and about what employees want from work. Once the purpose has been identified, organizations can help their people live it more fully at work (Dhingra et al., 2020). Managers should thus not only talk about the company's purpose, but also about the unique purpose of each individual within the organization, starting with their own. They must learn to "listen" and understand their employee's purpose, from the selection process onward, to guide the development of the individual purpose and align it with the organizational purpose (Rey, Velasco et al., 2019). The connection between individual and organizational purpose is hereby unique for each employee as it emerges from the person's life purpose (Rey et al., 2019).

One example of an individual purpose, often mentioned by the younger generation, but also more and more midlife career occupants, is the wish to make a positive societal contribution (Imperator, 2017). If companies can help employees fulfill this purpose, it also has benefits for them. As research has shown, the social image of an organization affects the self-image of employees. Concretely, if companies have a good social image, employees feel obliged to bring

themselves more deeply into their work to reciprocate the social image they get from their organization. Organizations that care about doing good are thus more engaging because they offer social value that is a relevant resource for workers.

A research project conducted in 2016 by Bissola and Imperatori provided empirical support for the relevance of the social dimension as an antecedent of employee engagement. Their findings were that

- (1) the social meaningfulness of work – the perception of how socially relevant the content of one's job is in helping others and supporting their wellbeing – is a significant antecedent of both job and organization engagement and
- (2) adherence to the social values of the organization – the perceived alignment between personal values and the social image of the organization – is a significant antecedent of organization engagement (Imperatori, 2017).

These realizations come with implications for HR and internal communication professionals as they highlight the relevance of social issues in designing HRM practices. According to Imperatori (2017), the social impact of an organization can become a strategic HRM tool to activate the energy and passion of all employees. However, for this strategy to be successful, the social impact must be properly communicated and reinforced. First and foremost, employees must be informed about social initiatives and given the opportunity to participate. Corporate social projects and initiatives with specific social mandates should not only be designed and communicated to better engage external stakeholders, but also implemented involving internal employees (Imperatori, 2017). Additionally, the social relevance of each job should be highlighted to support the social meaningfulness framework of each employee (Imperatori, 2017). The selection process can also aim to align the social values of the candidates with the organization's social image. Training activities can then reinforce the social organizational dimension, for instance by activating social projects as development activities (Imperatori, 2017).

In short

In a way, purpose and engagement can be seen as mutually reinforcing elements. The reinforcing character between purpose and engagement can be explained by the fact that once employees have aligned their individual purpose to the company's purpose, they are much more likely to report high engagement towards the organization. These high engagement levels then further motivate them to work towards the achievement of the organization's goal, aka the corporate purpose.

For a corporate purpose to show its positive impacts and to be perceived as legit internally as well as externally, it must be lived and driven forward by employees. Employees can however only drive the purpose if management has made an effort to involve and engage them in it. To achieve this, organizations should not underestimate the importance of individual purpose. By helping their employees identifying and articulating their individual purpose, organizations can encourage employees to discover the connection between their individual and the organization's purpose. Furthermore, as organizational purpose normally includes a societal "added value" and many people wish to make a positive societal contribution, finding this connection should not be too difficult. Nevertheless, making the connection obvious requires good communication. For that reason, the next section will focus on internal communication.

2.3. Internal Communication

As mentioned in section 2.2.4, communication is required to highlight the connection between individual and corporate purposes. Those who have already dealt a little more closely with the subject of communication probably know Paul Watzlawick's famous statement "You cannot not communicate". Concretely, this statement means that not communicating is never an option. Every human behavior ultimately sends a communicative message, even if it is not explicitly expressed or even unintended. In organizations, communication is equally inevitable. Whether it is managed or not, communication happens all the time (Yeomans & FitzPatrick, 2017). And while daily interactions between colleagues are mostly automatic because they are a necessary part of "getting the job done", the organization also has a responsibility to ensure that the staff understands the organization's overall goals and priorities (Yeomans & FitzPatrick, 2017). According to Yeomans and FitzPatrick (2017), the process of communication helps individuals find a "common purpose" and allows engaging employees in the organization's "bigger picture".

Consequently, internal communication is not just a concern for multinational or very large organizations, but important for all companies that wish to maintain "internal conversations" (Yeomans & FitzPatrick, 2017). Especially when organizations are undergoing some form of change or restructuring, like it is the case when a company decides to become purpose-driven, internal communication plays a vital role. According to Gartner (2020), the planning and implementation of a restructuring project cannot work without professional communication (Gartner, 2020). Hence, why it makes sense to study the role of internal communication in engaging employees in corporate purpose. Nevertheless, before coming to that, one must first understand how the concept of internal communication is defined and how it is linked to change management, organizational culture, and employee engagement.

2.3.1. What is internal communication?

The definitions and objectives of internal communication

According to Yeomans and FitzPatrick (2017), internal communication (also called "employee communication", "internal marketing" or "internal public relations") is, simply put, the term used to describe an organization's managed communication system where employees are regarded as the internal public or stakeholder group. Buchholz and Knorre (2019) explain that internal communication refers to all internal horizontal and vertical processes of organized communication. Those processes, "by influencing the knowledge, attitudes and behaviors of the members of a company, enable decisions to be made, bring about acceptance for these decisions [...], and create trust in the managers²" (Buchholz & Knorre, 2019, p.8). In that way, the communication processes in question maintain and promote productivity and enable the achievement of material and immaterial corporate goals. By seeing internal communication as a lever to achieve corporate goals by influencing organizational productivity, Buchholz and Knorre (2019) thus highlight the function's strategic importance for corporate management.

Yeomans and Fitzpatrick (2017) explain that while some authors take the relational perspective on internal communication, other authors focus on the strategic communication perspective. The

² Translated from German to English

relational approach places emphasis on the trust created between management and employees and the connectedness among employees. The strategic approach sees internal communication as a way of helping employees make sense of organizational change and complexity (Yeomans & FitzPatrick, 2017). These two approaches raise the question of whether internal communication promotes one-way or two-way communication. On the one hand, the existence of internal communication is, in the first place, linked to an organization's need to effectively communicate information about important changes (one-way communication). But, on the other hand, the concept of employee engagement suggests that building two-way trusting relationships is a big concern for organizations (Yeomans & FitzPatrick, 2017).

For Men (2021), it is very clear that internal stakeholders, predominately employees, are not just passive receivers of a message. They are active players in the internal communication process as they co-construct meaning and co-create the relationship with the organization (Men, 2021). According to Men (2021), internal communication is both a management function and a public relations specialization. As internal communication aims to achieve specific internal communication goals, it is to be seen as strategic in nature (Men, 2021). Consequently, Men (2021) suggests naming it "strategic internal communication". Important to note is that internal communication is not to be confused with the similar term of organizational communication, which studies all communication phenomena inside an organization and focuses on how the organization functions (Men, 2021). Internal communication can be split into hierarchical communication (i.e., communication initiated by leadership), corporate internal communication (i.e., communication initiated by the communication department) and horizontal/peer communication (i.e., employees as communicators or message receivers) (Men, 2021).

The objectives of internal communication

According to Buchholz and Knorre (2019), the basic, fundamental objective of internal communication is to promote the coordination of work processes, support cooperation and strengthen the employees' identification with the organization. Additionally, internal communication can also have a motivational or mobilizing function (Buchholz & Knorre, 2019). For Yeomans and FitzPatrick (2017), most communication activities fall into the following six categories:

- Ensuring the organization meets its legal obligations in talking to employees
- Supporting major change
- Promoting collaboration and a sense of community in the workplace
- Encouraging external advocacy (getting employees to promote their organization to the outside world)
- Contributing to employee retention
- Ensuring employees know what is expected of them and how to achieve it

Besides the fundamental objectives, Buchholz and Knorre (2019) furthermore see the integration of employees in the company's activities as an integral part of internal communication. This integration is achieved through internal socialization, meaning that internal communication professionals should create, maintain and further develop a system of shared values and attitudes and thus influence corporate culture (Buchholz & Knorre, 2019). Understanding people's motivations is key to the role of the internal communicator. On the one hand, to create content that people will want to read or view, but perhaps even more importantly, to advise leaders on how to interest and enthuse their people (Yeomans & FitzPatrick, 2017). When it comes to the

skills required by an internal communication manager, it is thus not only the ability to write well and produce high-quality content but also to understand the overall business. Internal communication managers have a strategic role in providing advice to senior management and so, they must demonstrate advisory and managerial skills (Yeomans & FitzPatrick, 2017).

Additionally, internal communication managers must also be able to develop relationships. This requirement is favored by the personal attribute of empathy and the ability to understand the different motivations and concerns of internal publics (Yeomans & FitzPatrick, 2017). Simultaneously, internal communication should also favor the opening of the company to impulses from the corporate environment. In an increasingly volatile environment, insights from external reference groups gain more significance. Consequently, the establishment of new communication relationships between employees and mentioned external reference groups should become another focus of internal communication practitioners (Buchholz & Knorre, 2019).

For Buchholz and Knorre (2019), the overarching objective of internal corporate communication is therefore to include “employees and their resource potentials in management and core processes so that the purpose (meaningfulness) of the company can be fulfilled and the corporate and business strategies can be optimally developed and implemented³”. To achieve this end, the internal communication function should enable both employees and executives to engage in (self-) observation and (self-) reflection and should contribute to their sense of purpose (Buchholz & Knorre, 2019). Concretely, the objectives are achieved through communicative influence on knowledge, attitude, and behavior by strengthening employees’ identification with the company, motivating them to contribute to the company’s development, and mobilizing their performance reserves (Buchholz & Knorre, 2019).

Another way to look at the objectives of internal communicators is provided by Men (2021) who categorizes the functions of internal communication into five groups: (1) inform, (2) listen, (3) connect, (4) acculturate and inspire, (5) motivate and engage. Informing employees is the most fundamental role of internal communication and the first step toward aligning employees with the organization’s strategies, decisions, mission, vision, and purpose. Listening to internal stakeholders promotes dialogue which can be a source of co-creation, innovation, and mutual understanding. Connecting refers to relationship building and allows employees to feel connected to the company, the leaders, and the other employees. Acculturating and inspiring describe internal communication’s ability to make sense of the organization including its mission, vision, values, beliefs, and purpose. Acculturation and the creation of a shared identity are created through the communication, interpretation, and instilling of values and beliefs among employees. Finally, motivating and engaging are primarily to be seen from the leadership communication perspective, for instance through words of positive feedback, encouragement, and appreciation. Internal communication that connects personal employee goals to the organization’s higher purpose can help employees see meaning and the positive impact of their job. This motivates and engages employees (Men, 2021).

³ Translated from German to English

The corporate internal communication channels and tools

To communicate, internal communication practitioners need channels to pass messages. Those channels can be categorized according to their use. In line with the previously mentioned objectives of internal communication, channels can, according to Yeomans & FitzPatrick (2017) be used to:

- **Push** out information (such as news or changes to policies)
- Allow staff to **pull** out information
- Provide **understanding** aids
- Promote **community**
- Generate **debate**

To push out information, internal communication practitioners can for instance use staff e-mails, news pages on intranets, newsletters, internal TVs, or digital displays. To allow staff to pull out information, the intranet and video content available on there can be very useful. As understanding aids, training, team meetings, and face-to-face events are usually the better tools. The same goes for promoting community and generating debate for which events and collective activities are highly relevant. Yet, online platforms, such as internal social media (or internal social networks) can also be used in this context⁴ (Yeomans & FitzPatrick, 2017). Madsen (2021) defines internal social media (ISM) as communication platforms inside the organization that allow organizational members to share knowledge and views and connect with others across departments, hierarchical levels, and geographical distances. Internal social media can be an integrated part of the intranet, known as a social intranet, or be a separate communication tool such as Yammer, Slack, or Microsoft Teams (Madsen, 2021). The benefit of ISM is that it enables symmetrical communication (dialogue) and employee participation (Madsen, 2021). According to Men et al. (2020), internal social media can also be linked to employee engagement as the use of internal social media leads to higher levels of perceived transparency of the organization and organizational identification. Both of those factors have a positive influence on engagement (Men, O'Neil & Ewing, 2020).

In short

Internal communication describes an organization's managed communication system in which employees are regarded as the internal public or stakeholder group. It has both a relational and a strategic role and should promote one-way as well as two-way communication. Internal communication can be split into hierarchical communication, corporate internal communication, and horizontal/peer communication (Men, 2021). In the context of the research question, internal communication is mostly to be understood as corporate internal communication. Nevertheless, the importance of hierarchical and horizontal communication will not be neglected. As internal communication has a motivational and mobilizing function, the integration of employees into the company's goals and the creation of a shared identity are an integral part of the communication function (Buchholz & Knorre, 2019). Regarding purpose, Men (2021) states that by connecting personal employee goals to the organization's higher purpose, internal communication can help employees see meaning and the positive impact of their job.

⁴ See APPENDIX 2: Internal Communication Channels According to Their Use

2.3.2. Why is internal communication important in change management?

As touched upon in the introduction of section 2.3., internal communication plays a vital role when organizations are undergoing some form of change or restructuring. According to Malek and Yazdanifard (2012), communication is a key issue in the successful implementation of change because it is used to announce, explain and prepare people for change (Malek & Yazdanifard, 2012). When change is not effectively communicated, this can create barriers during the implementation phase, for instance through internal resistance. Humans are creatures of habit and so they tend to initially resist change (Malek & Yazdanifard, 2012). When changes are imposed without consulting employees, the latter often feel confused about why the organization changes and how it will impact their job (Malek & Yazdanifard, 2012). If employees are however involved in the planning and development, they are much more likely to support change (Yeomans & FitzPatrick, 2017). Consequently, it is important for organizations to manage change in an adequate manner, meaning in a way that makes employees ready to accept it.

According to Malek and Yazdanifard (2012), communication can build awareness of the need for change and can generate the desire to participate in the change and support it. For this to happen, communication must be two-way, meaning that employees get the information they need, but also the opportunity to ask questions and raise concerns (Malek & Yazdanifard, 2012). Additionally, Malek and Yazdanifard (2012) highlight the importance of making communication a managerial priority. It is not sufficient to have communications come from the corporate communications or human resources functions only (Malek & Yazdanifard, 2012). Yue, Men and Berger (2021) confirm this insight, seeing leadership communication as a key determinant of successful change management. Leaders, and especially CEOs, should clearly define the vision of the change and explain why change is happening to reduce employees' uncertainty and resistance.

For Malek and Yazdanifard (2012), the five functions of internal communication during change initiatives are:

- **Information sharing:** Internal communication is used to announce organizational changes and inform stakeholders about the nature, timing, and significance of the change (Malek & Yazdanifard, 2012).
- **Participation:** Making employees participate often creates greater commitment and reduces resistance (Malek & Yazdanifard, 2012). As it is not always possible to include all employees, organizations should identify those groups that, either because of their skills and expertise or because of their authority, should be involved more deeply. Communications should then be adapted for each group (Yeomans & FitzPatrick, 2017).
- **Vision and motivation:** Employees must understand the vision and objectives related to the change. Communication can be used to convey this vision and objectives and to point to the drivers that legitimate the deviation from existing organizational attitudes, beliefs, and practices (Malek & Yazdanifard, 2012). Leaders' visionary communication during change has been identified as a lever for motivating employees toward change (Yue et al., 2021).
- **Compliance:** Change can create anxiety and stress. Communication is needed to reduce potential fears and to provide stability in transitional periods (Malek & Yazdanifard, 2012).

- **Feedback:** To make sure that the change process can continuously be improved, both managers and employees should be able to give and receive feedback during the process. This requires the structuring of a communication process that enables vertical (top to bottom) as well as horizontal communication flow (Malek & Yazdanifard, 2012).

To make sure the change process is successful, companies should draft a communication plan that allows them to share essential information with the right audience at the correct time. Communication plans set the framework for communication and gather the communication-related activities, goals, tools, audiences, and timetables in one place (Malek & Yazdanifard, 2012). Of course, having a communication plan, but no way to measure its effectiveness does not make much sense. In line with the view “what gets measured gets done”, Harkness (2000) is convinced that the effectiveness of change-related communication programs must be measured to show how employee communication is linked to business strategy. However, when the goal is to engage employees in the company’s values and visions, collecting quantitative data is not enough. The measuring tool must be able to capture qualitative data – that is information on changes in attitudes and behaviors and the employees’ emotional commitment. Therefore, Harkness (2000) suggests using communication forums such as focus groups or brainstorming sessions. Another indicator could be the number of “change champions” who have been recruited to motivate others (Harkness, 2000). A culture audit could also provide a measurement of the managers’ and communicators’ effectiveness in building enthusiasm for the company’s future (Harkness, 2000).

In short

Internal communication is an important component of change management because it is used to announce, explain, and prepare people for change. Good communication reduces the risk of internal resistance and makes people want to participate in the change (Malek & Yazdanifard, 2012). Therefore, companies need to draft a communication plan before initiating the change. This plan should not only contain communications that emanate from the communications department, but also leadership communication as managers, and especially the CEO, have a responsibility of communicating the vision of the change and explaining why it is happening (Malek & Yazdanifard, 2012). Additionally, the communication plan should allow for measurement of its success. When the goal is to engage employees in the company’s values and visions (or its purpose), the measuring tool must be able to capture qualitative data such as changes in attitudes and behaviors (Harkness, 2000).

2.3.3. How does internal communication influence organizational culture?

As previously stated, internal communicators are responsible for developing a system of shared values and attitudes and in that way influence corporate culture (Buchholz & Knorre, 2019). Corporate culture, according to Buchholz and Knorre (2019), is the totality of historically grown and jointly lived norms and attitudes of all employees and managers. Those attitudes and norms become visible in the behaviors, communications, decisions, actions, and symbols of the organization’s members. Corporate culture thus corresponds to the sum of behaviors of all the people in the organization (Meier, Lütolf & Schillerwein, 2015). Studying the influence of internal communication on organizational culture in the context of corporate purpose is relevant

because the successful implementation of a purpose requires a certain company culture that must be built. Additionally, corporate culture is believed to have an influence on several performance parameters of companies among which are the identification of employees with their employer and their work as well as the commitment and engagement of employees (Sackmann, 2021).

Changing culture as such (culture as the overall construct) is not possible but changing the different aspects of culture is. It translates into changing the individual behaviors (Meier et al., 2015), so replacing “old” behavioral patterns with new ones. Even though cultural change cannot be achieved through communication measures alone, internal communication has a considerable role to play in organizational culture. For Men (2021), culture is intertwined with internal communication and does not only represents the “personality” of the organization, but also “serves as the glue that binds employees” (Men, 2021, p.5). Thornton et al. (2019) describe culture and communication as “two sides of the same coin”, explaining that one cannot exist without the other and the absence of one will inevitably affect the other (Thornton et al., 2019). To highlight the importance of organizational culture, some authors used the “good apples and good barrels” analogy (Paraventi, 2019). Building the “right” corporate culture starts with selecting and hiring the “right” people. People whose individual personalities and moral values are in line with the organization’s requirements are, in this analogy, the “good apples”. Yet, only having “good apples” is not enough. If one does not take good care of them, meaning if one does not store them in a “good barrel”, they will turn bad nonetheless. What the barrel is to the apple, the business culture is to the employee (Paraventi, 2019).

Communication plays a central role in conveying culture to employees because an existing culture manifests itself both in the communication content and in the preferred communication media used by an organization (Sackmann, 2021). Yet, as explained by Sackmann (2021), the use of communication media does not only reinforce the existing corporate culture, but culture, in turn, also influences employee communication in its nature, expression, and frequency. Additionally, corporate culture gives an indication of which tools should be preferred for which type of communication. Consequently, the relationship between corporate culture and employee communication is “not a one-sided influence”, but “a dynamic, reinforcing interplay between the shaping of all dimensions of employee communication by corporate culture and the maintenance as well as the further development of an existing corporate culture through the employee communication practiced in daily work processes⁵” (Sackmann, 2021, p.47). For internal or employee communication to achieve its intended goals, an understanding of the existing corporate culture with its fundamental collective beliefs is thus required (Sackmann, 2021).

If the goal is to influence or change culture through communication, it can, according to Paraventi (2019), only be achieved by overcoming the instrumental dimension of communication in which information is read and transmitted in an “asymmetric and purely technical” way. This assumption builds on the view that organizational behavior is influenced by five main factors: (1) desire and will of leaders, (2) authorization or historic justification, (3) coherent communication, (4) management practices, and (5) informal narratives (Paraventi, 2019). Looking at the first factor which influences behavior, *desire and will of leaders* describes the need for senior leadership and direct managers to set a good example. As Paraventi (2019) explains, leadership needs to support and influence the construction of the organization’s moral values as communicators can only address ethics, morals, and compliance if the issues are legitimized from the top down. Exemplary

⁵ Translated from German to English

behavior is for instance encouraged by creating specific areas for the management of an issue, creating committees that have legitimate autonomy within the organization, aligning processes and mechanisms, and matching the performance demands with the demands for values (Paraventi, 2019).

Regarding the second factor, *authorization and historic justification*, it is obvious that history cannot be re-written. Yet, if its course must be changed, it can be done through a collective process of changing views. The communicators' role is, in this case, to present the paths for change by initiating transparent dialogue with the public. The third factor, *coherent communication*, refers to the need for coherence between the real demands of the internal public and the existing employee communication as well as the other factors (efforts from senior leadership, historic legitimacy, and management practices). *Management practices* (fourth factor) are essential when forming and changing organizational culture because the formal processes of an organization must be aligned to the (new) values the company wants. Finally, informal narratives play a role in organizational culture because facts generate stories, and stories, in the act of being told and retold, are adapted to create collective meaning. Consequently, organizations must make sure to have good facts to tell (Paraventi, 2019). To continuously have good facts and thus good stories to tell, ongoing commitment is needed from both leadership and internal communications.

In short

Corporate culture is the totality of historically grown and jointly lived norms and attitudes of all employees and managers within an organization (Buchholz and Knorre, 2019). It can be shaped by internal communication as an existing culture manifests itself both in the communication content and in the preferred communication media used by an organization (Sackmann, 2021). Interestingly, internal communication does not only influence corporate culture, but culture also influences internal communication as it defines the frequency and nature of communications (Sackmann, 2021). Important to note is, however, that communicators alone cannot build or change an organization's culture. It requires the commitment and dedication from senior leadership which should, first, legitimize conversations about culture and, second, put in place coherent practices to align formal processes with corporate values.

2.3.4. How does internal communication relate to employee engagement? And corporate purpose?

According to Yeomans and FitzPatrick (2017), the internal communication objectives of encouraging employees to act as advocates and getting them to stay and to work harder both fall into the category of employee engagement. As the authors explain, communication enables people to make judgments about their workplace. For instance, if employees are well informed about training opportunities or hear many stories about peers that grew within the company, they are more likely to believe that they themselves can achieve personal growth within the company (Yeomans & FitzPatrick, 2017). This positively contributes to their willingness to engage. As Cézanne et al. (2019) point out, the general view is that internal communication can improve employees' propensity to engage because it can make them feel more involved and valued. The link between engagement and certain internal communication practices, such as innovative communication initiatives, open communication channels, and constant feedback and information sharing, has also been proven in studies (Cézanne et al., 2019). For instance, the study by Men

(2020) showed that the use of internal social media contributes to the organization's perceived transparency and improves employees' identification with the organization. Both perceived organizational transparency and organizational identification, in turn, positively impact employee engagement (Men et al., 2020).

To get a clearer picture of the influence of communication on engagement, Cézanne et al. (2019) separately studied the three internal communication practices of dissemination, consultation, and participation in relation to engagement. Similar to the differentiation between strategic and relational communication, Cézanne et al. (2019) differentiate between instrumental (productive) and interactionist (integrative) communication. Information dissemination practices are instrumental communication while consultation and participation practices are interactionist communication. Employee engagement is, for the study, translated into the two dimensions of job satisfaction and adherence to company objectives. One result of the study is that participation practices have a significantly positive effect on job satisfaction. For information dissemination and consultation practices, the link to job satisfaction can however not be proven. For the adherence to company objectives, the results are the same: participation practices positively impact employees' adherence to company objectives while the influence of information dissemination and consultation practices on adherence is not evident. Besides the positive impact of participation practices, the study also reveals that a calm social climate within the company positively affects both job satisfaction and adherence to company objectives.

Knowing that participation practices positively impact employee engagement by contributing to job satisfaction and adherence to company objectives, it is important to understand what practices are understood as "participative" in the context of the study. In fact, for Cézanne et al. (2019), participation practices are for instance idea boxes, company newspapers, quality actions, company projects, seminars, and employee satisfaction surveys. Consultation practices, which also belong to interactionist communication but do not demonstrably impact employee engagement, are workshops, meetings, group discussions, or similar formats. Lastly, dissemination practices (which also do not significantly impact engagement according to the study) seek to provide information on the company's strategy and orientation, its economic situation, its social and environmental impact, its evolution perspectives, salary developments within the company, existing training opportunities, and upcoming technological or organization changes (Cézanne et al., 2019).

While the study, just as any other study, has its limits, the results are still highly relevant because they can be applied to the research question of this thesis. As a corporate purpose is a company objective (and in fact the company's highest, most essential objective), the study results are also useful when it comes to the engagement of employees in purpose. As revealed by the study, adherence to company objectives is most strongly influenced by participative internal communication practices. It thus makes sense to develop a participative and people-centric internal communication that enables listening to employees and considering their proposals (Cézanne et al., 2019). Instrumental communication is necessary, but it is not sufficient to stimulate employees' engagement. Cézanne et al. (2019) thus suggest renewing traditional instrumental communication practices by combining them with interactionist and especially participative practices. Instrumental communication should thus neither be thought of as isolated nor sufficient to engage employees (Cézanne et al., 2019).

Regarding the engagement of employees in building a purposeful organization, Dhanesh (2021) sees a link to internal corporate social responsibility communication (ICSRC), arguing that ICSRC could be leveraged to build a purposeful organization. For the author, if the purpose is an organization's reason for existence, meeting the organization's social and environmental responsibilities (CSR) is a way of delivering purpose. Corporate purpose is thus strongly intertwined with social responsibilities. The reason why many (young) people want to engage in purpose-led, socially and environmentally responsible companies can potentially be explained through the concept of "hypermodernity" (Dhanesh, 2021). For Dhanesh (2021) the "hypermodern individual" is characterized by "(a) a paradoxical focus on self and others, (b) the need to actively construct exemplary individual identities (c) a penchant for emotional and experiential consumption (d) a love of "hyperspectacles" and (e) a paradoxical obsession with enjoying the present while being racked with anxiety about the future" (Dhanesh, 2021, p.140). Based on these characteristics, engaging employees in experiential CSR programs could help hypermodern employees satisfy many of their needs: the longing for enriching, qualitative experiences, the desire to create social value, and the need to be part of a community that allows them to create a unique personal identity.

The idea of "experiential" CSR programs is in line with Cézanne et al. (2019)'s "participative" approach, as for both the overall idea is to use communication strategies of engagement and involvement to create conversations among employees. These conversations can then make employees see the connections between their own and the organization's goals and needs. According to Alex Malouf, Corporate Communications Director at MEA Schneider Electric, organizational purpose and CSR are two concepts that "feed off and amplify one another", meaning that one concept can help understand the other one. To engage employees in building a purposeful organization, Malouf suggests involving them in regular CSR activities that they came up with themselves. The internal communication team's job would then be to talk to employees about their ideas to see if they are feasible and to craft stories around the activities (Dhanesh, 2021).

In short

Many authors believe in internal communication's ability to drive employee engagement. By separately studying the three internal communication practices of dissemination, consultation, and participation in relation to engagement, Cézanne et al. (2019) found that participative communication practices have the strongest positive effect on employee engagement. This is the case because they positively impact both job satisfaction and adherence to company objectives. The finding in question can be applied to the engagement of employees in corporate purpose for which the development of participative and people-centric internal communication initiatives seems to be of great value. By looking at the links between engagement, internal communication and corporate purpose, Dhanesh (2021) revealed that internal CSR communication (ICSRC) could be leveraged to build a purposeful organization. By involving employees in "experiential" CSR programs and letting them come up with activities themselves, organizations encourage their employees' identification with the organization and create actual investment in the organizational purpose.

2.4. Key Takeaways from the Theoretical Frame

Before moving on to part three, which discusses the research hypotheses and provides additional elements for answering the research question, it makes sense to summarize what can already be taken away from the theoretical frame. The first takeaway regarding corporate purpose is that the concept of purpose has something inherently “engaging” and that engaging employees in corporate purpose should therefore not be an impossible task. As explained through Maslow’s hierarchy of needs and the “need for universality” (Bruce and Jeromin, 2019), human beings need a sense of purpose and self-fulfillment. Not seldomly, this need materializes in the wish to contribute to the common good. That being so, addressing the deeply rooted human needs appears to be an essential component of employee engagement. This insight gives first action points to internal communicators as communication initiatives should allow employees to see how their individual purpose aligns to the organizational purpose.

The second takeaway is that for a purpose to bring benefits to the company, it must be significant, authentic, profitable, and seriously implemented (Bruce & Jeromin, 2020). A purpose statement should be (1) specific enough so that people can identify with it, (2) broad enough for it to be adaptable to market dynamics, and (3) open enough to allow for co-creation with relevant stakeholders (Winter & Germelmann, 2020). If those conditions are unfulfilled, it is rather unlikely for a company to get real engagement from its employees; independently of the efforts put into the endeavor. The previously mentioned conditions can thus be seen as purpose engagement prerequisites. If companies start thinking about engagement only after the definition of the purpose, it might already be too late. A purpose should be designed in a way that considers all stakeholders, among which the company’s employees. To make sure this is the case, it might make sense to involve internal communicators from the outset instead of only considering them when it is time to communicate the purpose to the internal public.

Regarding the section about employee engagement, one takeaway is that everyone can be engaged, independently of their personality (Imperatori, 2017). This is relevant for the study of the research question because if engagement was purely linked to people’s personality types, there would be no use trying to find out by what means people can be engaged. Additionally, the finding that engagement, while not being a behavior itself, influences work-related behavior is relevant for the measurement of engagement levels. If engagement could not be measured, the effectiveness of communication measures that should lead to engagement could not be measured either. This would be problematic for the justification of engagement-related internal communication spending.

Another takeaway regarding engagement is that companies should not overdo their engagement attempts as this could lead to unrealistic expectations, feelings of manipulation, or exhaustion (Imperatori, 2017). With purpose, it is imperative to avoid creating a gap between “what is said” and “what is done”. This requires a careful approach in the handling of purpose- or engagement-related communications. The study of engagement antecedents furthermore revealed that engagement always arises out of a combination of several components. It would thus be utopian to believe that engagement could be reached through internal communication on its own. Communication only shows its full effect if other antecedents, such as a supportive leadership style, a positive work climate, various career opportunities, job security, and meaning of work are given (Imperatori, 2017). Engagement requires an engaging culture and the right interplay of job

and organization characteristics, interpersonal relationships, HRM practices, and personal traits. Additionally, engagement is not a point of arrival but a long-term and ongoing process that requires continued actions over time (Saks, 2006). To continuously engage employees in corporate purpose, it is thus not sufficient to only foresee actions at the beginning of a company's purpose journey.

Yet another interesting revelation is that meaningfulness, so purpose at work, is an engagement antecedent. This leads to the conclusion that the relationship between purpose and engagement is not a one-sided influence but that both concepts amplify each other. On the one hand, a sense of purpose leads to higher levels of engagement, but, on the other hand, engaged employees are also what makes the pursuit of a higher purpose possible in the first place. As individuals are more likely to experience a sense of meaning if they perceive their role to be in alignment with their self-concept (Imperatori, 2017), this re-stresses the importance of showing employees how their individual purpose relates to the corporate purpose. Once employees have aligned their individual purpose to the company's purpose, they are much more likely to report high engagement toward the organization. These high engagement levels then further motivate them to work toward the achievement of the organization's goal, which, ultimately, is the corporate purpose.

For internal communication, one takeaway is related to the function's role. Internal communication should help employees make sense of organizational change (Yeomans & FitzPatrick, 2017), strengthen their identification with the organization, and motivate and mobilize them (Buchholz & Knorre, 2019). That being so, it becomes obvious why internal communication is relevant for the engagement of employees in corporate purposes. Moreover, as internal communicators have a strategic role in providing advice to senior management (Yeomans & FitzPatrick, 2017), they cannot only communicate the purpose once it has been defined but can also actively support the process of defining purpose. In parallel, communicators can build awareness of the need for change and generate the desire to participate in it. As explained earlier, the five functions of internal communication during change initiatives are (1) sharing information, (2) making employees participate in the change, (3) conveying the vision and objectives of the change, (4) reducing anxiety and stress, and (5) establishing feedback processes (Malek & Yazdanifard, 2012). It should hereby be underlined that commitment toward the initiative must not only come from internal communication professionals but also from senior management. Strong leadership communication is crucial in times of change and especially when a cultural change is required (Malek & Yazdanifard, 2012), (Yue et al., 2021)

The last takeaway is that participative communication practices appear to have the strongest positive impact on employee engagement (Cézanne et al., 2019). This insight shows organizations which communication media to prioritize in purpose-related communications. For Cézanne et al. (2019), participation practices are idea boxes, company newspapers, quality actions, company projects, seminars, and employee satisfaction surveys. In line with the idea of the "participative" communication approach, Dhanesh (2021) sees a positive contribution in the use of "experimental" CSR programs to build purposeful organizations. This provides further ideas for the structuring of engaging communication programs.

3. Hypotheses

As explained in the introduction, the research question “What is the role of internal communication in engaging employees in corporate purpose?” gives rise to two hypotheses:

H1: Internal communication can support the internalization of corporate purpose when the purpose is introduced retrospectively.

H2: The way corporate purpose is communicated influences people’s engagement in the topic.

The following two sections provide some theoretical insights and study results that, in addition to the practical studies conducted at Swiss Life, can help to validate or refute these hypotheses.

3.1. Discussion on Hypothesis 1

H1: Internal communication can support the internalization of corporate purpose when the purpose is introduced retrospectively.

To find out whether internal communication can support the internalization of corporate purpose, one must first look at how a higher purpose can be internalized or integrated into the value chain in the first place. As the interest in this topic has been increasing in the past years, different authors have proposed frameworks for the development of purpose.

3.1.1. Frameworks for the development of corporate purpose

To understand how corporate purpose is developed within an organization, one could look at the framework by Almandoz, Lee and Ribera (2018). The authors suggest “unleashing the power of purpose” in five steps:

1) Set a clear mission and measure it

Top management should have a clear view of where the organization wants to go and how to get there. Only if they do, are they able to measure progress. Accordingly, the purpose should be linked to measurable improvement targets.

2) Foster consistent culture through people management

As organizational culture influences the extent to which purpose is experienced as meaningful, corporate culture should be measured at three levels:

- Recruitment and fit: recruit people who prioritize prosocial objectives and “servant leadership” (putting others first) to ensure a consistent culture,
- Socialization and training: deliver training and organize socialization practices to encourage the prosocial behavior the company strives for,
- Reward systems: reward those who exemplify the desired attitudes and behaviors in order to reinforce them.

3) Focus on making daily work meaningful

The company’s purpose should be translated into the daily work of each employee so that it is not just treated as a CSR side project.

4) Pay attention to peripheries

To make work more meaningful for employees, companies might want to look at peripheral areas to address people who feel excluded or whose potential to contribute has been overlooked by society (e.g., people with disabilities).

5) Cultivate better managers

The company's purpose can only spread throughout the entire organization if all managers are on board. Therefore, competency development, and especially people skills, are essential. Managers must be able to help others develop by giving and receiving feedback, observing and assessing, coaching and mentoring, and designing work experiences

(Almandoz et al., 2018).

Another framework was proposed by Quinn and Thakor (2018): Their framework has eight steps:

1) Envision an inspired workforce

When seeing the relationship with their workers purely in terms of the "principle-agent problem", supposing that agents are effort-averse and underperform unless they are motivated by contractual incentives, organizations overlook those people or teams which exceed the norms. Yet, those people can be great positive examples that have the potential to inspire others. The key is to find out what drives them and to discover how this can inspire the rest of the workforce.

2) Discover the purpose

The purpose is not something that is invented, it is something that already exists. It can be discovered through empathy; by asking questions, listening, and understanding the needs of your workforce.

3) Recognize the need for authenticity

If the company announces its purpose and its values, but these do not reflect the behavior of senior leadership, employees recognize the hypocrisy of the statement and become more cynical. In this case, the process does more harm than good.

4) Turn the authentic message into a constant message

Implementing a purpose cannot be seen as a project that is completed after a certain amount of time. It is a never-ending process. Only when the purpose is communicated with authenticity and constancy, employees recognize the management's commitment and start believing in it themselves.

5) Stimulate individual learning

Learning and development are powerful internal motivators because people want to think, learn and grow. If leaders show faith in their employees' potential, the employees gain confidence and become more committed to the organization and the higher purpose that drives it.

6) Turn midlevel managers into purpose-driven leaders

If the goal is to have a committed and inspired workforce, purpose cannot only come from the very top. Middle managers play an essential role in communicating the organization's purpose to the workforce. Consequently, they do not only need to know the purpose but must also be able to deeply connect to it and lead with moral power.

7) Connect the people to the purpose

Once both top and middle managers are on board, they must help frontline employees understand how the purpose connects with their daily tasks. For this step, employees must

be involved. If it was only top-down, the purpose would be less likely to permeate the culture and shape the behavior of employees.

8) **Unleash the positive energizers**

Find those people within the organization that are already purpose-driven and have an optimistic orientation. These people can naturally inspire others and assist cultural change.

(Quinn & Thakor, 2018)

As both Almandoz et al. (2018)'s and Quinn and Thakor (2018)'s frameworks use a linear approach, it makes sense to look at one final framework which builds on a different approach. According to Rey and Bastons (2020), the linear approach, while having value in that it gives companies a concrete action plan, also has relevant limitations. The authors describe it as misleading because it makes it look like successful cases of purpose-driven organizations result from a linear movement. The internalization of purpose, however, is not linear. Purpose development usually requires balancing multiple, seemingly incompatible objectives (e.g., prosocial and economic goals). Therefore, it requires, according to the authors, not a linear but an "oblique" approach capable of providing causal explanations between concepts initially considered disconnected (Rey & Bastons, 2019).

According to Rey and Bastons (2019), if you speak to people in a company with a truly embedded purpose, they will not tell you that they defined, enculturated, and then articulated the purpose. Instead, they will describe stories and anecdotes full of oblique logic. An example of an oblique approach could be "purpose first, profits second". Differently put, when you follow your higher purpose, good things, like monetary benefits, will automatically follow. Rey and Bastons (2019) therefore propose a framework that is not linear but formed by three unique, yet interrelated, components: knowledge, motivation, and action.

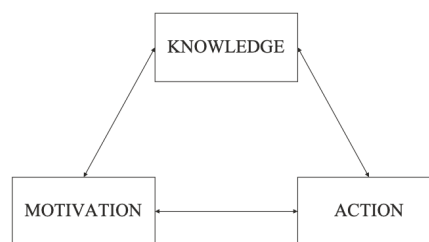


Figure 1: 3D model of purpose

Source: Rey, C., & Bastons, M. (2019). Three Dimensions of Purpose: Knowledge, Motivation, and Action. In C. Rey, M. Bastons, & P. Sotok (Eds.), *Purpose-driven Organizations* (pp. 29–41). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-17674-7_3

In this model, *knowledge* represents the explicit understanding members have about an organization's purpose. When members do not know the purpose and are not able to express it in their own words, it will not develop within the organization. The purpose must be at the forefront of consciousness and cannot be taken for granted. *Action* represents the practical fulfillment of purpose. Purpose does not only exist as a statement. It must be made explicit, or put into practice, through its operational development. Finally, *motivation* is represented by the needs found in every individual. When the purpose is felt by people, it can become a great source of energy that helps them grow beyond their own interests. This is when they are contributing the most to the fulfillment of the purpose. For Rey and Bastons (2019), a higher purpose should never only be seen from the perspective of a statement or a purposeful action. The purpose must be pursued for

its own sake. Because when the “purpose of the purpose” is not purpose but making more money, the development can never be successful (Rey & Bastons, 2019).

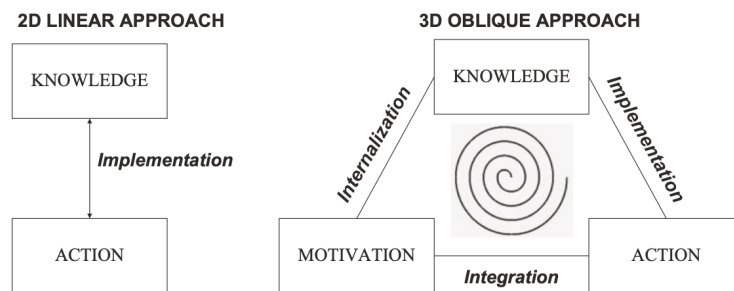


Figure 2: Comparison of the linear and the oblique approach for purpose development

Source: Rey, C., & Bastons, M. (2019). Three Dimensions of Purpose: Knowledge, Motivation, and Action. In C. Rey, M. Bastons, & P. Sotok (Eds.), *Purpose-driven Organizations* (pp. 29–41). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-17674-7_3

Consequently, to make the purpose come to life, all three dimensions of purpose must be developed coherently and harmoniously, and none can be left behind. Combining knowledge with motivation leads to the *internalization* of the purpose, combining knowledge with action leads to its *implementation*, and combining motivation with action leads to its *integration*.

- The purpose *internalization* is the process through which members of an organization incorporate the purpose in their beliefs and motivations. Internalization transforms the purpose from something abstract into something “sought after” or desired by its members.
- The purpose *implementation* is when the purpose is expressed in concrete actions. It can be observed in the contributions a company makes to society and the people around it. It is the extent to which the company fulfills and intends to fulfill its formal purpose. At this point, purpose translates to strategy, objectives, and tactical choices.
Purpose implementation must always go hand in hand with internalization. If the purpose is being implemented without simultaneously being internalized, strategy development could be perceived as inauthentic or incoherent with regard to the professed purpose.
- Purpose *integration* is the result of naturally combining implementation and internalization. It is when purpose becomes a habit and translates into everyday actions. Integration reflects the purity of intention in daily tasks and is the opposite of talking in platitudes. Through purpose integration, lasting relationships form between the company and its stakeholders (Rey & Bastons, 2019).

Internalization, implementation, and integration are not sequential steps. They develop simultaneously because one cannot properly be developed without the other. There is no direct cause-effect relationship between them, but they are nonetheless related to each other (Rey & Bastons, 2019).

3.1.2.Key Takeaways

When it comes to the development of a corporate purpose, there are many ways to approach the process. Certainly, which method is ultimately successful largely depends on the organization itself. After all, what works for one company, may not necessarily work just as well for another.

Nevertheless, there seem to be some universal takeaways that can support companies during their internalization process. Many of those takeaways confirm what has been said in the theoretical part of this paper. Firstly, and probably most importantly, a company's higher purpose cannot be invented. It must be discovered. Otherwise, it will never be authentic, and the organization might be accused of purpose-washing. Secondly, and this goes hand in hand with authenticity, the purpose must be pursued for its own sake. Thirdly, every single person in the company must know and understand the purpose. Understanding in this context means "being able to express the purpose in their own words" and grasping its meaning for the company and all its stakeholders (including the employees themselves). This insight gives a first action point to internal communication professionals as they have a responsibility of making the purpose known within the company and can help employees understand its meaning. If this action point would have to be labeled, it could be seen as "reducing the abstractness of the corporate purpose".

Reducing abstractness does not only mean making employees understand the purpose, but also showing them how it reflects in their daily work tasks. This is what Rey and Bastons (2019) call integration, so the interplay of motivation and action. As explained by Quinn and Thakor (2018), employees need to be involved in this step. A top-down approach will not work. Accordingly, this could be a good moment to activate participative communication techniques, potentially in collaboration with line managers. As highlighted by the frameworks, it is essential that all managers are on board. As leadership is often understood in terms of influencing others to contribute to the achievement of shared goals (Yue et al., 2021), the importance of leadership comes up again and again in purpose-related publications. Consequently, managers have a considerable responsibility in communicating the company's higher purpose.

Continuing the takeaways, a purpose must always become visible in the company's contributions to society. This is another action point for internal communication. Many companies contribute positively to their environment, but employees might not always be aware. By showing them what the company is already doing well, internal communication can help to elevate the perceived authenticity of the purpose. Additionally, through internal communication, employees can also be encouraged to actively participate in actions of societal value that fulfill the company's purpose. This highlights the company's desire to make the purpose come to life and shows that it is pursued for its own sake. Besides this, internal communicators should identify and show positive examples within the company. Positive examples, or to use the words of Quinn & Thakor (2018) "energizers" are employees who are already very engaged and can be a source of inspiration to other employees. A part of the purpose-related communication could therefore focus on "presenting the case" of engaged employees.

Another takeaway from the frameworks is that the integration of a corporate purpose needs the right (prosocial) company culture. As internal communication has an influence on the corporate culture (cf. pp. 30-32), encouraging the cultural transformation is another internal communication action point. Finally, the last takeaway from the frameworks is that a company's purpose journey is never over. There will be no point in time at which a company can stop communicating its purpose. Consequently, the purpose is something that will never leave the agenda of internal communication managers.

3.2. Discussion on Hypothesis 2

H2: The way corporate purpose is communicated influences people's engagement in the topic.

To show how the communication of a company's purpose can influence employee's engagement, this section gives some insights from a German Purpose study.

3.2.1. Insights from a Purpose study

Even though corporate purpose has been a hot topic in many companies in recent years, a study from the year 2020 revealed that more than half of the skilled workers and managers are not able to name their company's purpose. The study in question was conducted by the HR and management consultancy *Kienbaum* in cooperation with the German purpose agency *human unlimited* in the German-speaking area. From the 1,300 interviewed workers and managers, only 41% were able to spontaneously cite the purpose of the company they work for (Kienbaum, 2020b). For Frank Dopheide, founder of *human unlimited*, this shows the "large transmission gaps" that appear on the way from the communication to the implementation of a company's purpose.

One reason why employees are, according to the study, not able to name the purpose of their organization is because it is not differentiated enough from the company's vision and mission. From the 41% of employees which claim to know the company's purpose, only 34% affirm that their company clearly differentiates purpose, vision and mission. Upon closer inspection, it becomes apparent that for those companies which have separate vision, mission and purpose statements, the fewest have statements that actually do justice to the understanding of the three terms. Consequently, there seems to be a lot of confusion about the difference between purpose, mission and vision. Furthermore, it also seems like the purpose is not communicated to lower levels of the hierarchy. A clear difference was visible between the lower and middle salary segments, where more than half of the respondents are unaware of the purpose debate, and the higher salary segment, where the percentage only lies at 38% (Kienbaum, 2020a).

An additional cause for an inadequately communicated purpose is that the purpose was in 46% of cases not developed and introduced at a specific point in time and that employees were not involved in the process. Only 27% of employees indicate that they participated in purpose-related initiatives (like workshops, company days, agile transformation, seminars, ...). More than half of the participants even deny this participation. For the majority of respondents, the responsibility of communicating the purpose lies with management, but some also expect more effort from human resources and internal communication (Kienbaum, 2020b). On a scale from 1 to 6, the surveyed employees rate the CEO and management's responsibility in implementing the purpose at 5.4. For internal communication and HR, the ratings lie at 4.9 and 4.8 respectively. The gap between the actual and the desired involvement is highest for the HR function (Kienbaum, 2020a).

For study leader Prof. Dr. Walter Jochman, managing director and partner at Kienbaum, the HR function must come in and support the purpose development process initiated by management from the very beginning. For him, the HR function has a functional role as change agent and

partner to top management (Kienbaum, 2020b). Interestingly, companies that have a stronger focus on stakeholder involvement have, according to the study, a more pronounced and more clearly communicated purpose. Furthermore, the purpose has a stronger influence on decision-making processes such as investment and personnel decisions and employees experience increased credibility and trust in the organization. This also has an influence on employee's satisfaction with their work and with the behavior of the organization and its leaders. If the organization cares about its stakeholders, employees report increased emotional commitment and engagement as well as an increased sense of purpose and meaningfulness of work (Kienbaum, 2020a).

3.2.2. Key Takeaways

The study confirms that internal communication plays an important role in making the purpose known within the company. The awareness of purpose seems to decrease vertically within the company's hierarchy and purpose is losing substance in the lower levels of the organization. Especially employees without leadership responsibility are hardly involved in purpose implementation and so, they are, to a large extent, unfamiliar with the debate around purpose and the concrete purpose statement. Additionally, they are less often capable of clearly distinguishing the concepts of purpose, mission and vision (Kienbaum, 2020a). A purpose which allows employees to engage requires an initial clarification of the general understanding of the term and should be developed in collaboration with stakeholders. Additionally, the purpose as such must be clearly communicated and "staged" in an unmissable way. Ideally, the purpose is therefore introduced at a specific point in time and encouraged by internal activation campaigns as well as communication plans that foresee the communication of the purpose to all stakeholder groups (Kienbaum, 2020a).

Nevertheless, purpose communication also needs high commitment from the CEO and executives, as employees perceive them as the main actors in charge of corporate purpose. The CEO should thus initiate and visibly encourage the development of strategic initiatives linked to purpose. Managers, for their part, should provide cross-divisional support, translating the purpose into specific action derivations for their department and onboarding their teams. The internal and external communication as well as HR functions support the management's efforts. HR should integrate the purpose into HR strategy and processes (recruiting, talent management, performance management, ...) and collaborate with corporate communications to develop a concept for implementing the purpose effectively and transparently. External communication should help increase employer attractiveness (employer branding) and internal communication should document and communicate best cases and sustainable purpose development progress (Kienbaum, 2020a).

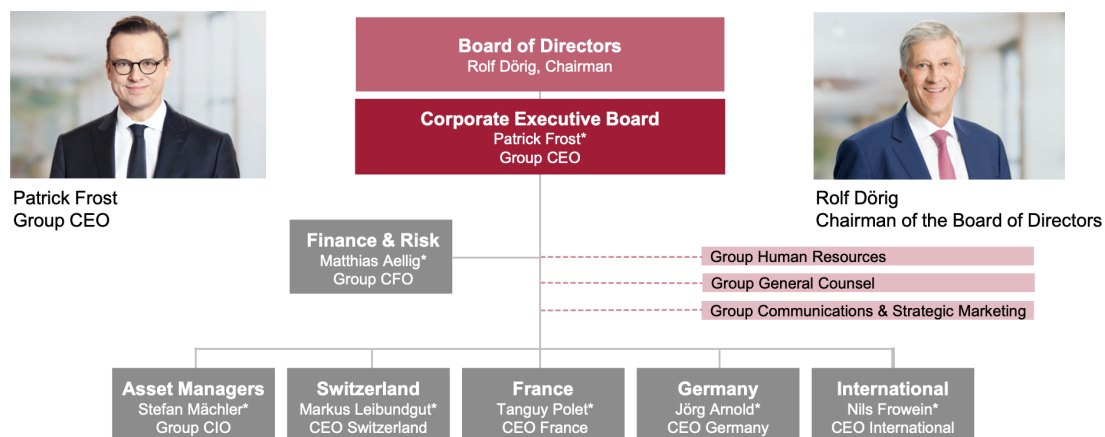
So, in conclusion, first insights from the German study make it seem like the way corporate purpose is communicated, and by whom, does indeed influence people's engagement in the topic. Engagement requires explanations at all levels, a participative communication approach and simultaneous and continuous communication efforts from all three actors: executives, human resources and internal communication. The findings of this study shall be confirmed or refuted using insights from Swiss Life Global Solutions in the next part.

4. Case Study: Swiss Life Global Solutions

Now that many theoretical and some practical insights about the engagement of employees in corporate purpose have been gathered, it is time to compare these insights to the data collected in the studied organization, namely the insurance company Swiss Life, and especially its subsidiary Swiss Life Global Solutions (SLGS). This forth part of the thesis focuses thus entirely on the company in question, firstly giving some context about the company and then focusing on the company's purpose, its corporate culture, and the fit between the two. In relation to the research question, internal communication an engagement are the other two variables studied at SLGS.

4.1. About the Company

Swiss Life Global Solutions is part of the Swiss Life Group, a Swiss insurance company with over 160 years of experience. The Swiss Life Group, which is headquartered in Zurich, is a leading provider of comprehensive life, pension, and financial solutions in Europe (Swiss Life, n.d.-f). Swiss Life's company purpose is to ***enable people to lead a self-determined life*** by helping companies and individuals identify financial risks at an early stage and take corresponding measures. Key hereby is long-term, sustainable investing, so that guarantee promises can be kept over several decades (Swiss Life, n.d.-f). In 2021, the Group realized a net profit of 1,257 million and employed around 10 000 people. Additionally, the firm works with a network of around 17 000 advisors. Swiss Life is made up of five divisions: Swiss Life Switzerland, Swiss Life France, Swiss Life Germany, Swiss Life International and Swiss Life Asset Managers (Swiss Life Global Solutions, 2022), and also includes various subsidiaries.



* Member of the Corporate Executive Board

Figure 3: Organization of Swiss Life

Source: Swiss Life Global Solutions. (2022). *LifeNet* [Intranet].

Swiss Life Global Solutions belongs to the International division which offers high net-worth individuals and multinational corporations a comprehensive range of insurance solutions (Global Solutions), as well as tailored advice on future provisions, risk and investment planning for retail and affluent customers (Independent Financial Advisors). The international Independent

Financial Advisors (IFAs) operate under the names *Chase de Vere* in the United Kingdom, *Fincentrum* in the Czech Republic and *Swiss Life Select* in Austria, Slovakia and the Czech Republic (Swiss Life Global Solutions, 2022). Swiss Life Global Solutions offices can be found in Luxembourg, Liechtenstein and Singapore with a representative office in Hong Kong (Swiss Life Global Solutions, n.d.). The Luxembourg office, which is the point of focus of this study, is the Global Solutions official hub. From here, business partners and international clients are serviced in markets across Europe and the world (Swiss Life Global Solutions, n.d.). As Swiss Life Global Solutions provides a broad range of cross-border insurance solutions and services for wealthy individuals and international companies, the services are divided into Global Private Wealth Solutions and Global Employee Benefits Solutions. The representation hereunder explains the organization of the International division and Swiss Life Global Solutions within this division.

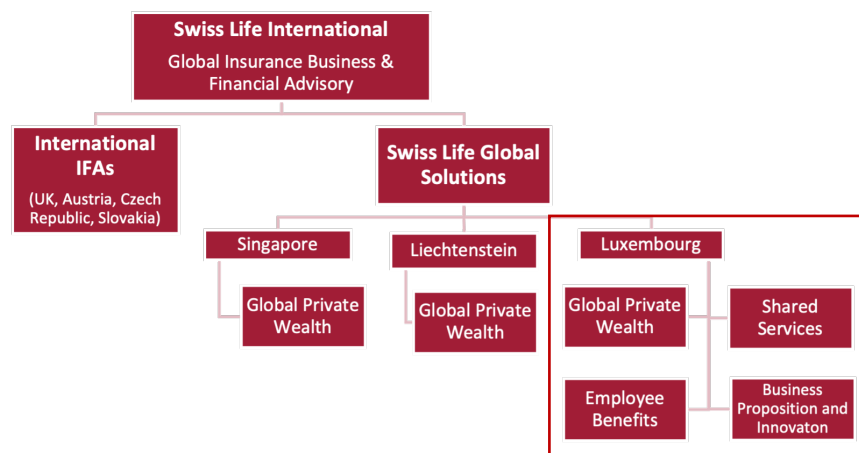


Figure 4: Organization of the International Division

Global Private Wealth offers high-end solutions for integrated wealth and succession planning for European and Asian markets. By collaborating with various distribution partners such as private banks, asset managers, brokers and family offices, Global Private Wealth can combine life insurance with a wide range of investment opportunities for high net-worth individuals (Swiss Life Global Solutions, 2022).

Global Employee Benefits offers tailored solutions for local and mobile employees by combining cross-border expertise with the local know-how of their network of partners. The local and cross-border solutions offered from Luxembourg include life insurance, health and pension provisions which are designed as flexible modular programs. Clients can thus select provisions that include what matters most to their businesses and employees. The global network of independent local insurance companies (Swiss Life Network) enables global reach (Swiss Life Global Solutions, 2022).

In total, Global Solutions covers more than 80 countries and has over 65 leading partners and 200 global experts positioned throughout Europe and Asia. Besides the two branches Global Private Wealth and Global Employee Benefits, the Swiss Life Global Solutions offices in Luxembourg, legally referred to as Swiss Life (Luxembourg) S.A., also host the shared services/ functions (HR, Legal & Compliance, Finance & Risk, IT & Organization) and the Business Proposition and Innovation department (marketing, product management, innovation, and digital projects)⁶.

⁶ For an overview on the organization of Swiss Life Global Solutions see APPENDIX 3: Swiss Life (Luxembourg) SA Organization Chart and APPENDIX 4: Swiss Life Global Solutions

4.2. About the Swiss Life Purpose

Since the willingness to engage in a purpose largely depends on the purpose itself, it makes sense to take a closer look at Swiss Life's purpose, which is to *enable people to lead a self-determined life*. As explained in the theoretical frame, for a purpose to bring benefits to the company, it must be significant, authentic, profitable, and seriously implemented (Bruce & Jeromin, 2020). Additionally, it must be (1) specific enough so that people can identify with it, (2) broad enough for it to be adaptable to market dynamics, and (3) open enough to allow for co-creation with relevant stakeholders (Winter & Germelmann, 2020). To find out whether Swiss Life's purpose fulfills these criteria, it must be evaluated how the purpose fits into the business (authenticity, profitability), why and how it was adopted (seriousness of implementation), and what the concept of self-determination entails for significant stakeholders, especially employees and customers, but also the company itself (significance).

4.2.1. How does the Swiss Life purpose fit into the business?

Self-determination, or more precisely “the longer self-determined life” has been a guiding theme at Swiss Life since around 2018, when this theme evolved into Swiss Life's group-wide purpose. “Enabling people to lead a self-determined life” arose from the realization within the company that the ongoing demographic change, which leads to increasingly longer lives, is massively underestimated in almost all areas of life (Swiss Life, n.d.-e). According to Swiss Life, longevity is a topic in need of a new perspective because the longer people live, the more important it is for them to plan tomorrow's financial requirements. Swiss Life's purpose of “the longer self-determined life” is thus flanked by the two topics of “longer life” and “financial confidence”. Self-determination was chosen as a topic because people have a deeply ingrained wish to control their own lives - no matter their generation, income level, or gender. Additionally, in Swiss Life's view, to gain control over their lives, people must be able to make decisions with confidence (Swiss Life, n.d.-e).

In Swiss Life's communication strategy for SL2021⁷, the relationship between self-determination and the insurance business is explained as follows: insurance, pension, and investment solutions cover people from risks and thus allow them to make plans, continue developing and concentrate on their strengths and interests whilst knowing they are protected (Swiss Life, n.d.-e). Insurance providers enable companies and individuals to take risks without having to put their very existence on the line. In that way, they encourage innovation and investment and allow the accumulation of capital by protecting it from risks. Over the decades, insurance companies have thus altered the way we view risks. Through the selection of long-term asset classes and the sensible treatment of risks, Swiss Life can enter into obligations that cover several generations of customers (Swiss Life, n.d.-e). This is especially essential in a world where people live ever longer lives and where there is no guarantee that national systems will continuously be able to carry people's longevity.

Considering this explanation of how Swiss Life's purpose fits into the business and why it is relevant for people, the purpose does seem to fulfill the criteria of authenticity and significance.

⁷ Company strategy for the years 2019-2021

SLGS' Marketing & Communication Manager Diane Mersch explains: "the purpose is not something we invented. It is the basis of what we do. It is already our job to help customers and offer them choices. The Group has simply put words on it and shifted the focus to it, so that everyone becomes aware of it"⁸(D. Mersch, personal communication, 31 March 2022). To find out whether employees feel the same about the Swiss Life purpose, an internal Purpose Perception Survey is performed every year. In this survey, employees are, among other things, asked if the Swiss Life purpose "We enable people to live a self-determined life" fits the business. Knowing that this question has to be answered by giving a score from 1 (does not apply) to 6 (applies fully), 74% of the participating employees from the International division assigned one of the upper two scores in 2021.

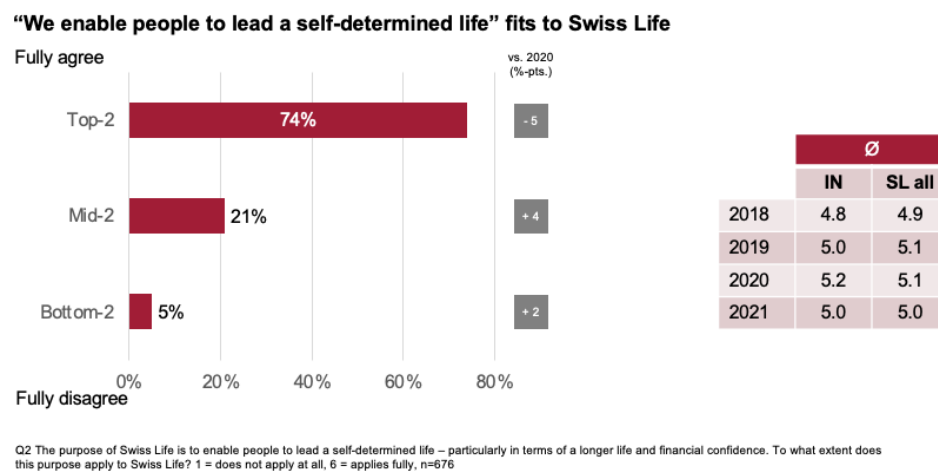


Figure 5: Employee's Purpose Perception: Purpose- company fit

Source: Swiss Life. (2021, September 27). *Employees' Purpose Perception: International* [Power Point Presentation].

Concretely, this means that about three-quarters of the interviewees agree that the purpose fits well with the business. Only five percent of the surveyed gave a score of one or two, indicating that they do not believe the purpose to be fitting. Nevertheless, it must not be forgotten that the participation rate of the survey only lies at 44%. The views of over half of the workforce are thus not represented in these results. The question arises whether the outcome would be worse if all employees participated. One could assume that those who do not participate in the survey are those who are not interested in the topic. And a lack of interest most likely leads to a lack of engagement. But of course, there could also be other reasons for non-participation.

Besides these results, figure 5 also shows the evolution over the years and the comparison between the International division (including SLGS) and the entire group. Compared to 2018, when the purpose was first introduced, the perception of the purpose as being fitting to the business has increased in both the International division and the entire group. Yet, from 2020 to 2021, the average rank awarded to the question has slightly decreased, from 5.2 in the International division, respectively 5.1 in the group, to 5.0 in both business lines. Even though this difference is small, it would be interesting to know which factors influenced this development. One possible explanation could be the impact of the Covid-19 crisis on people's perception of their workplace. Another explanation could be the turnover within the company that may have led to the hiring of

⁸ Translated from French to English

many new employees which were still relatively unfamiliar with the company's purpose. Regardless of what the reasons might be, the results of the survey show that people's perception of purpose can change over time, both for better and for worse. This conclusion is relevant in relation to the research question because if a view can change, it can most likely also be influenced, whether through internal communication or any other means.

The employees that did not find the purpose to be fitting argued that, from their perspective, self-determination cannot only be seen as something financial. In the 2020 Purpose Perception survey, one employee wrote⁹: "If the clients are not healthy when they retire, what is the point of having millions on the account? We should spend much more resources on the health, prevention, and well-being, keeping our clients happy, healthy, and engaged rather than just financially well". Other employees mentioned that the term "self-determined" can be difficult to understand and translate and that people might feel more at ease with easier terms such as "confident" or "successful" life. Additionally, as self-determination is not given in all cases, the expression "*help* people to lead a self-determined life" should be preferred over "*enable* people to lead a self-determined life". Yet another argument was that, in the case of Employee Benefits, it is the employer, and not the beneficiary, who chooses the plan. Consequently, Swiss Life is not actually contributing to the self-determination and freedom of choice of its final client (Swiss Life, n.d.-a).

In the interviews that were conducted with Luxembourg-based employees, some also mentioned that it is hard for them to see the link between what Swiss Life de facto offers and their client's self-determination. As the concept of self-determination is rather vague and can be interpreted in several ways, some people find a link and others do not. One employee explained their view as follows: "I understand the need for a well-crafted estate plan and how this allows one to be serene about one's future. But I do not see how this contributes to determination." Further along, they also mentioned that the purpose is "too abstract to be convincing". In the sample of interviewed people, as small as it may be, it becomes noticeable that the employees who indicate that they do not believe the purpose to be fitting, are also those employees who report low levels of engagement in the purpose. This finding suggests that engagement levels could be increased by explaining to employees how exactly the purpose fits the business. Surely, this falls into what has been labeled "reducing the abstractness of the corporate purpose" in the third part and which seems to be, at least in part, a responsibility of the internal communication team.

Nevertheless, there were, among the interviewees, also employees who found the purpose to be fitting. One employee argued that self-determination is not possible without long-term security and the feeling of being protected in case of an unforeseen event. Another employee expressed the view that administering people's money in a way that allows them to have cash availabilities when they most need them contributes to their self-determination. These justifications are in line with how Swiss Life sees the link between the purpose and the business. Interestingly, several interviewees see a stronger link between self-determination and the Employee Benefits side of the business than with the Private Wealth side. It appears that understanding how disability insurance and retirement planning contribute to people's self-determination is easy. For the Private Wealth business, establishing the link is less intuitive. One employee expressed the view that Swiss Life needs to listen to its clients more and that currently, the focus at Private Wealth is on getting more fees for the business rather than enabling people's self-determination.

⁹ The survey is anonymous so that employees can freely express their opinion.

Building on the previous assumption that the perceived purpose-business fit influences people's engagement, the observed difference between the two sides of the business raises the question of whether the communicative approach must be adapted to the different parts of the business. For companies with different business lines, it seems plausible that more (communicative) effort is required in some lines than in others. Even though the study at Swiss Life Global Solutions is technically not big enough to draw any reliable conclusions, it is surely worthwhile to keep this in mind when establishing the company's internal communication strategy. The Purpose Perception Survey outcomes strengthen the impressions of the interviews by showing that employees in the Private Wealth business allocate less importance to having a purpose than employees in the Employee Benefits business. Furthermore, they perceive the purpose as less fitting than employees in Employee Benefits (38% vs 50%) (see APPENDIX 5: Purpose Perception Survey 2021: Overview Business Areas).

4.2.2. How seriously implemented is the Swiss Life purpose?

To be able to assess how seriously implemented a purpose is, one must first determine the motives behind the introduction of the purpose. According to the communication strategy for SL2021¹⁰, the Swiss Life purpose has been developed to prove to people that the company remains relevant for decades to come. Relevant to its employees and customers, but also to the capital markets and society at large. In the spirit of Simon Sinek's "people don't buy what you do; they buy why you do it", Swiss Life states that people do not buy risk insurance, consultation, and investment or pension solutions for their own sake – they buy practical ways to lead a self-determined life (Swiss Life, n.d.-e). To achieve the goal of "remaining relevant", it is, according to Swiss Life, crucial to deal with future trends and developments on an emotional, intellectual, social, technological, and economic level. The purpose thus provides orientation in five different dimensions:

- It provides strategic clarity, leading short-term decisions and long-term strategy
- It bundles innovation, focusing on developments that matter
- It leads the way in times of constant change and motivates employees with meaningful work
- It meets a universal need, which is the desire to contribute to something greater
- It builds bridges, facilitating collaboration (Swiss Life, n.d.-e).

The reasons for the elaboration of the Swiss Life purpose can be regarded through three pillars in which the Swiss Life purpose is believed to bring advantages: employees, customers, and financials.

¹⁰ Company strategy for the years 2019-2021

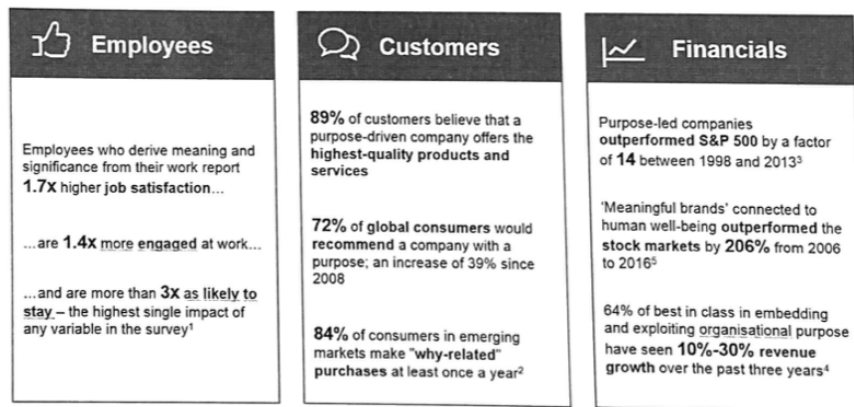


Figure 6: The benefits of corporate purpose

Source: Swiss Life. (n.d.-e). *The self-determined life—Our communication strategy for 'Swiss Life 2021'*.

The way in which the corporate purpose was introduced and the reasoning behind the articulation of the purpose suggests that Swiss Life showcases the example of the *purpose-supported differentiation*. As discussed in section 2.1.2., there are three different purpose structures. The purpose-supported differentiation refers to already established companies that decide to adopt a purpose at a later stage to stand out from the competition. The market environment is in this case characterized by a mature market, increasing competitive pressure, and high comparability of products. Differentiation via classical functional or emotional benefits is often difficult and so, companies try to differentiate through the active pursuit of a suitable and relevant purpose and the implementation of selected corporate activities such as communication campaigns (Bruce & Jeromin, 2020).

The identification of the purpose structure is insofar important, that it gives an indication of the effort that is put into the internal activation of the corporate purpose. As both the purpose-based structure and the purpose-centric transformation require tailoring the business model to the purpose in question, those structures might be seen as more "intense" forms of being purpose-driven. The purpose-supported differentiation is less disruptive in its character, which means that the evolution from not having a purpose to having one is potentially less tangible within the company. The lack of "radical" change within the company then also means that employees do not have purpose on their radar so much, which might make it harder to engage them in it. When studying the case of Swiss Life Global Solutions, it is thus important to keep in mind what purpose structure one is dealing with.

To get a grasp on how seriously implemented employees think the purpose is within Swiss Life, the Employee Purpose Perception survey asks employees to rate the purpose's tangibility. A score of 1 indicates that the purpose is not tangible at all and a score of 6 means that the purpose is very tangible. The results of the International division indicate that in the year 2021, 15% of the questioned employees found the purpose to be tangible or very tangible (scores 5 and 6). 44% allocated a score of 3 or 4, indicating that they find the purpose to be a bit less tangible. As shown in the figure below, the overall tangibility score for the International division is 4.4, lower than the score of the purpose-company fit (cf. supra p.47).

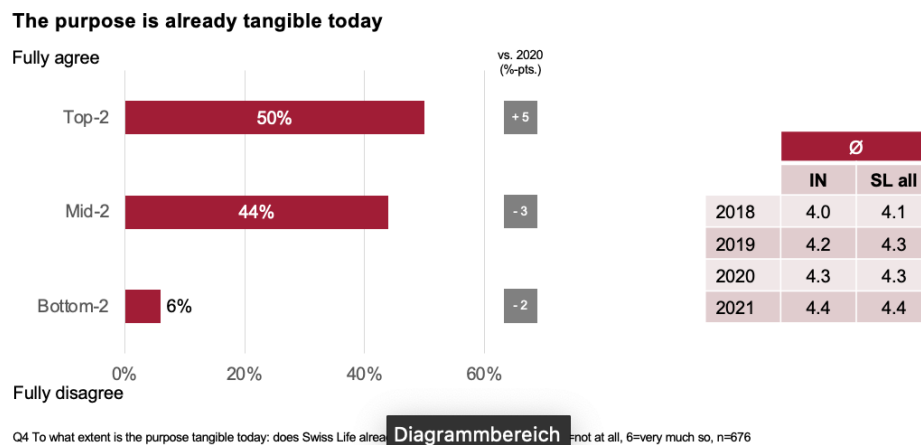


Figure 7: Employee's Purpose Perception: Purpose tangibility

Source: Swiss Life. (2021, September 27). *Employees' Purpose Perception: International* [Power Point Presentation].

The result thus leaves room for improvement. A positive sign, however, is that the tangibility score has steadily increased since the introduction of the purpose in 2018, both for the International division and the whole Swiss Life Group. This shows that initiatives to render the purpose more tangible have been crowned with success. Yet, as Marie Dreumont, Marketing & Communication Manager at Swiss Life Global Solutions commented: “There is still room for improvement. We all come to work, we have our missions, our things to do, but sometimes we lack the little extra that will make us feel that when we come to work [...], the work we do is to be able to offer choice, confidence, security. Because that is what we do, offer financial security”¹¹ (M. L. Dreumont, personal communication, 31 March 2022).

To better understand the almost fifty-fifty split, Luxembourg-based employees were asked if the purpose is, in their opinion, “well-anchored into the business”. Consistently with the outcome of the Purpose Perception survey, the opinions diverged for this question. Some employees believe the purpose to be well-anchored as the company's commitment becomes visible both in the purpose-related initiatives that have been taken and the company's culture. Frequently mentioned examples are the Purpose Workshops (“*Team Purpose Summer Parties*”), but also the well-being programs and retirement plans that exist for employees. Several employees mentioned that they see Swiss Life as an “enabler” and that the company offers flexibility and the possibility to evolve. Other employees think that the purpose is not well-anchored into the business because they do not feel it in their everyday work life and do not have it in mind when they work. As one employee put it, “it is not the purpose that motivates or energizes within Swiss Life, but other things, like for example the team dynamic”. Another employee mentioned that, for them, self-determination symbolizes independence and autonomy, but that this is not what they can observe in all departments. For them, the applied management approach sometimes goes in the direction of micro-management.

This argument shows that, while the question about the purpose-business fit made employees look at the customer's perspective (“can the customer be self-determined because of what we offer”), the question about the purpose implementation often makes employees consider their own perspective (“can I be self-determined at work”). When it comes to the implementation, it is thus

¹¹ Translated from French to English

important to consider both views. Employees must understand to what extent Swiss Life can enable their own self-determination, but they must also realize to what extent they themselves must contribute to the client's self-determination. For Christine Georis, Senior HR Manager at Swiss Life Global Solutions, the company must continue to work on the purpose issue internally to make employees understand that it is possible for them to impact the clients' self-determination (C. Georis, personal communication, 26 April 2022). Regarding the issue that some employees do not understand the meaning of the purpose, C. Georis sees it as problematic that the purpose was created from the perspective of external communication. The purpose is first directed to clients, and while there also is an aspect for employees, people do not understand it very well (C. Georis, personal communication, 26 April 2022).

4.2.3. What does the concept of self-determination entail?

As the concept of self-determination is both difficult to grasp and interesting in relation to engagement theory, it seems necessary to discuss it a bit further. Swiss Life did settled on the term "self-determination" after discovering its relevance in a representative survey carried out in Switzerland, Germany, and France (Swiss Life, n.d.-e). The survey in question revealed that for nine out of ten respondents (independently of their age and income), self-determination is a basic element of their life and that personal finance is considered the factor with the highest influence on self-determination (Swiss Life, n.d.-e). However, as it turns out, the concept of self-determination does not only make for a good corporate purpose because it speaks to many people, but also because there is reason to believe that it has a positive effect on employee engagement.

As mentioned in section 2.2.3. (cf. supra pp.20-21), engagement is influenced by the individual's personality and experiences, including their "competence, **self-determination**, self-reliance, a sense of personal accomplishment and the inclination to do something for one's own sake rather than for specific rewards" (Imperator, 2017). According to this view, self-determination is thus believed to be an engagement antecedent, which makes it a particularly good corporate purpose. Indeed, as was explained in section 2.2.4 (cf. supra pp.22-24), purpose and engagement are mutually reinforcing. This means that if a company promotes self-determination at work because that is its purpose, the self-determination felt by the company's employees will lead to higher engagement levels. The higher engagement levels make employees both more loyal to the company and more willing to make the purpose become true for the customer. The purpose thus encourages engagement and is also reinforced by high engagement levels.

Another reason why self-determination makes for an interesting purpose is that it is an integral part of what is nowadays often referred to as *New Work*. According to Giernalczyk and Möller (2019), *New Work* is "a current that is fed by deep dissatisfaction with conventional organizational structures" and the result of "changing values and changing demands" among the younger workforce (Giernalczyk & Möller, 2019, p.139). For Dr. Josephine Hofmann of the Fraunhofer Institute, the four cornerstones of *New Work* are (1) flexibility, (2) agility and self-determination, (3) flat hierarchies, and (4) meaningfulness of work (*New Work*, 2022). The opportunities for self-determined work are hereby especially relevant in the discussion as they delimit the concept of *New Work* from *Work 4.0* (Giernalczyk & Möller, 2019). Self-determination is defined as the "free choice of one's own acts or states without external compulsion" (Merriam-Webster, 2022a) or "the right or ability of a person to control their own fate" (Oxford Learner's Dictionaries, 2022).

According to Deci and Ryan's self-determination theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000), every human being has three basic psychological needs: the need for competence, the need for autonomy, and the need for relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2015). Those three needs can be found in every human, albeit in varying degrees of intensity. Applied to the work context, healthy and engaging work in the *New Work* context is work that addresses and satisfies these three basic needs (*New Work*, 2022).

Thus, the self-determination theory gives ideas for the work environment and organization that Swiss Life should promote to give employees the feeling of working in alignment with the company's purpose. This reasoning is consistent with the insights from the interviews. Several employees expressed the desire to work independently and autonomously (competence and autonomy), but also the wish to discuss and experience the purpose together with their colleagues (relatedness). Much is, therefore, again, linked to corporate culture and the way people perceive this culture. To evaluate how the Swiss Life culture does in terms of self-determination, section 4.3. (cf. infra pp.55-59) is entirely dedicated to corporate culture. However, before coming to that, there are some other aspects to consider regarding the concept of self-determination. Because even though the concept seems to make for a good purpose in theory, the practice has revealed some potential problems.

As touched upon in section 4.2.1. discussing the purpose-company fit (cf. supra pp.46-48), many employees find the concept of self-determination to be "too vague" or "too abstract" for them (or for clients) to identify with it. One employee explained it as follows: "I would like to have a purpose in the work I do, but maybe the concept of self-determination is too vague to really integrate it. Even when we had the workshops about purpose, we did not discuss what our team's purpose is in terms of self-determination, but more about what we, as a team, can do for our colleagues and ultimately the client. Our team purpose would always be the same, independently of the slogan chosen by Swiss Life." The employee in question thus understands in what way their job is essential to best serve the client, but they do not necessarily see how they can influence the client's self-determination with what they do on a daily basis.

During the Purpose Workshops ("*Team Purpose Summer Parties*") I attended in the summer of 2021, it also became clear to me that many employees, at least at that point in time, only had a vague idea of what the term means and did not know how to understand it in the context of the firm. To some extent, this is probably also linked to the fact that the term "self-determination" is not easy to translate. The Swiss Life purpose was first defined in German, using the term "selbstbestimmt" (D. Mersch, personal communication, 31 March 2022). This term is rather self-explaining in German as it literally means "deciding by oneself". In addition to that, the term is also frequently used in the German media, which means that the audience is already familiar with it (D. Mersch, personal communication, 31 March 2022). The English equivalent "self-determined" is, according to feedback from the English Swiss Life subsidiary *Chase de Vere*, not frequently used in everyday English (D. Mersch, personal communication, 31 March 2022).

"Determined" has the meaning of "having reached a decision" (Merriam-Webster, 2022b), but it also means "wanting to do something very much and not allowing anyone or any difficulties to stop you" (Cambridge Dictionary, 2014). The second meaning of determination, which connotes tenacity, is not relevant for the definition of self-determination but could cause confusion in some people. In Swiss Life's case, self-determination is equivalent to "having the freedom to decide on one's life". As D. Mersch explains: "it is the meaning behind the purpose and not the actual words

of the purpose that have to be translated”(D. Mersch, personal communication, 31 March 2022). Accordingly, the French version of the purpose is “vivre selon ses propres choix” and there is no mention of the literal translation (“vie autodéterminée”).

In the case of Swiss Life Global Solutions in Luxembourg, the English version of the purpose is used because both the employees and the clients have very different nationalities. Understandably, English is not the most intuitive for everyone and even if people understand the words, the interpretation of the self-determination concept is influenced by one’s cultural background. In dignity cultures (typically Western European and North American nations) for instance, self-determination is highly valued because, in those cultures, individuals are perceived as relatively equal and with a stable and internal sense of worth. In face cultures (typically East Asian cultures) however, self-determination has a less positive connotation because those cultures are more hierarchical and put greater emphasis on in-group harmony and modesty (Smith et al., 2017). The problem with the concept, therefore, lies in its various forms of interpretation.

Nevertheless, these potential understanding and interpretation obstacles do not make the concept of self-determination unsuitable to appear in a corporate purpose. It just means that internal communicators must put greater effort into the explanation of this purpose compared to a “more intuitive” purpose. No employee can engage or identify with a purpose they do not understand. As was stressed by one employee who used to work in the education sector, the *raison d’être* can be very clear in some sectors. In other sectors, it is less clear. Then it must be explained. Consequently, the practice confirms the theory: the most essential job in purpose communication is to make every employee understand the purpose to the point where they can explain it in their own words. This is the only way to ensure that employees can find a way to align their individual purpose to the company’s purpose.

4.2.4. Conclusion

Coming back to the claim that a purpose must be significant, authentic, profitable, and seriously implemented (Bruce & Jeromin, 2020), it can be said that Swiss Life does rather well in the first two categories. The purpose is significant for stakeholders because it results from a real societal issue, namely the need to rethink our society in the face of people’s longevity and the need for financial confidence to make decisions. Additionally, self-determination is a universal need and something everyone can theoretically relate to. The purpose is authentic in the way that it is perceived as fitting the business by most. Nevertheless, one point of criticism that remains is that self-determination is not only to be seen in the financial context. This raises the question to what extent Swiss Life can actually bring about self-determination.

The profitability of the purpose is hard to evaluate based on the conducted study, yet significance and authenticity make a good prerequisite for profitability. For the seriousness of implementation, some more efforts must be made in the eye of the employees as many do not “feel” the purpose in their work life. While Swiss Life’s purpose is “broad enough to be adaptable to market dynamics” and “open enough to allow for co-creation with relevant stakeholders”, it does not seem to currently be “specific enough so that people can identify with it”(Winter & Germelmann, 2020). The purpose remains abstract for many, and this is what Swiss Life needs to work on.

4.3. About Corporate Culture at Swiss Life Global Solutions

As the theoretical part of this paper revealed that corporate culture plays a major role in the engagement of employees in a higher purpose, it is worthwhile to look at Swiss Life's company culture. Even though it is hard to explain a whole culture in a few words, this section tries to explain what culture Swiss Life actively promotes by looking at documents related to SL's recent cultural transformation initiative. Whether employees perceive the culture in the same way as described in the documents is reviewed in a second step. The employees' perception of the topic is what finally allows us to evaluate whether the SL purpose fits its culture.

4.3.1. What are the main characteristics of the company's culture?

As introduced, Swiss Life recently underwent a cultural transformation that is part of the group strategy SL2021. The fact that the Group decided to initiate a cultural transformation at the same time it launched its purpose is probably to be taken as a positive sign as it hints at the company's awareness of the link between purpose and culture. As becomes visible in the figure below, the purpose of *enabling people to lead a self-determined life*, internally translates into **actively shaping your career**. For employees, self-determination is thus seen in terms of freedom to shape one's career. Concretely, Swiss Life wants to help employees "take optimal advantage of the opportunities and challenges of their professional lives" and this throughout all phases of their careers (Swiss Life, 2019).

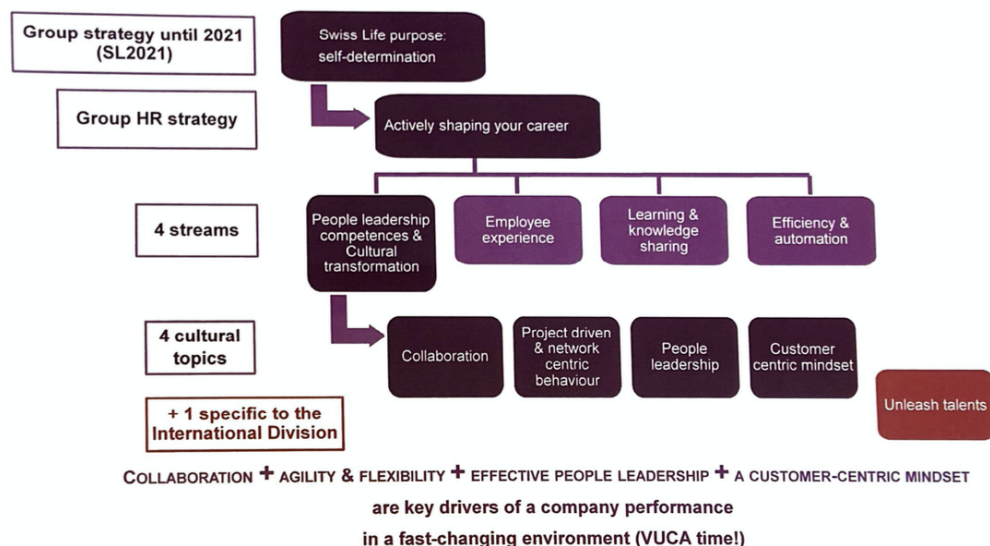


Figure 8: Cultural Transformation at Swiss Life

Source: Swiss Life Global Solutions. (2018). *Cultural Transformation 1st Workshop [PowerPoint Presentation]*.

To achieve this, Swiss Life wants to promote *employability* (remaining competitive through constant development), *work ability* (staying fit to work thanks to balance, motivation, and health), and *diversity* (Swiss Life, 2019). The "shape your career" mindset becomes visible in various initiatives like the "Unleash talents" program that should unmask existing know-how

within the company or the “Collaborate for Performance” workshop aiming at effective, stress-free collaboration and problem-solving. Regarding human resources management, C. Georis, Senior HR Officer and internal communicator clarified that there are almost no internal barriers for employees. They can proactively suggest projects or join existing ones. They can go on missions aboard or follow training to change their career path. They can discuss the development of their skills with their manager, or they can submit a request to work under a different employment contract (i.e. part-time) (C. Georis, personal communication, 26 April 2022).

As also shown in the figure, the HR strategy is organized according to four streams: (1) cultural transformation and people leadership competencies, (2) employee experience (including employee engagement and retention), (3) learning and knowledge sharing, and (4) efficiency and automation. Important for the cultural transformation, which largely focuses on people leadership, are the four topics *collaboration*, *network-centric behavior*, *purpose-driven leadership*, and *customer-centric mindset*. Related to the *collaboration* mindset, leaders and employees should interact more often with each other and share, stretch, and transform their perspectives, practices, and expertise to drive performance. The *project-driven and network-centric behavior* should lead leaders and employees to actively support and perform in projects and networks of teams. This behavior is a driver of efficiency, agility, flexibility, and competitiveness. The *customer-centric mindset* should encourage leaders and employees to consider the customer’s perspective in their everyday work to consistently support existing and potential new customers in leading a self-determined life. Customer-centricity is a driver for more effective and target-oriented results. Finally, *purpose-driven leadership* should initiate leaders to lead people by coaching and creating meaning and understanding with appropriate leadership styles. People should be engaged through the building of trust, inspiration, and empowerment. This kind of leadership is, according to SL, a driver for high-performing teams (Swiss Life Global Solutions, 2018).

As becomes clear when reading through the drivers of the cultural transformation, people leadership plays an important role in Swiss Life’s culture. In documents relating to the Group’s People Leadership workshops, the leadership culture is described as building on the Group’s purpose, its corporate strategy, its brand personality, and its corporate values. Additionally, “trust” and “empowerment” are seen as the Group’s essentials of people leadership. As becomes visible in figure 10, the brand personality reflects the focus on self-determination and is supported by the three corporate values of *individuality*, *confidence*, and *reliability*. The corporate values are in short: (1) we know our customers and their needs, (2) we work with passion to contribute to our customers’ peace of mind, and (3) we serve our customers with our know-how built on long-standing experience and financial solidity (Swiss Life, 2019).



Figure 9: Swiss Life Brand Personality and Corporate Values

Source: Swiss Life. (n.d.-e). *The self-determined life—Our communication strategy for 'Swiss Life 2021'*.

The six people leadership competencies promoted by Swiss Life are:

- 1) I think and act in an exemplary manner and the best interests of the company (role modeling/common goal),
 - 2) I create meaning and understanding within the context of our purpose (purpose/customer orientation),
 - 3) I trust my employees (trust/empowerment),
 - 4) I encourage appreciative collaboration (collaboration/empowerment),
 - 5) I promote the development of my employees (development/capability),
 - 6) I set and achieve ambitious goals (performance/effectiveness)
- (Swiss Life, 2019).

For employees, those six key competencies translate into:

- 1) I work in a committed and agile manner.
 - 2) I think consistently from the customer's point of view.
 - 3) I build trust by listening and communicating openly.
 - 4) I collaborate effectively in the best interests of the company.
 - 5) I pursue continual self-development.
 - 6) I act in an efficient and goal-oriented way.
- (Swiss Life, 2019).

To sum up, Swiss Life's key dimensions for their workforce 2025 are trust, self-determination, direction and dialogue, customer orientation, flexible working models, diversity and inclusion, networks, collaboration, result orientation and economic efficiency, compliance, digitalization, continuous development, and finally continuous improvement and innovation (Swiss Life, 2019).

4.3.2. How well does the purpose fit the culture?

To find out how well the Swiss Life purpose fits the company's culture, SLGS employees were asked to describe how they perceive the culture. All interviewees described it in a mostly positive way, using the terms non-hierarchical, international, multi-cultural, open, relaxed, and having

proximity between people. Interestingly, several people mentioned that they find the company to be both modern and traditional. One employee put it as follows: “There is a young dynamic. And when I say young, I am not just referring to the age. [...] But at the same time, there is also something “old””. The reason why this employee believes this to be the case is that “the individuals within the company are dynamic, but the collective is less so”. The company conveys flexibility, and to a large extent, this flexibility is given. Flexible working hours, open-plan offices, and the possibility to work in one of the urban offices instead of the main office give employees freedom in designing their workday. Nevertheless, some employees feel like the company remains too traditional in its ways to offer full flexibility. For one employee, there was a gap between what they had imagined the company to be like (based on the purpose) and what they felt it was actually like.

Nevertheless, when asked whether the culture was consistent with the purpose, everyone said that it was, even if there were some reservations here and there. One point, for instance, was that fewer hierarchical levels could be beneficial to empower people’s decision-making. Another argument was that the way people are recognized in the company should be adapted to value committed employees. And a third argument was that there is a misalignment between what the purpose promises and what Swiss Life can offer to customers in terms of quality. This point is however not directly linked to the culture. On a more positive note, one of the interviewees said that at SL, people get the opportunity to show what they can do and that the company is open to everyone as long as they are flexible and willing to learn. Another employee further observed that young people are very autonomous in the company and do not feel restricted to do what they want to do and to ask for what they think they deserve.

4.3.3. Conclusion

It can be said that according to employees’ perception of the culture and the initiatives that are being undertaken in the context of the cultural transformation, Swiss Life’s culture is on track to fit well with the purpose. Nevertheless, more efforts must be made to explain to employees in what way self-determination is to be understood for them. Employees assess whether the Swiss Life culture enables them to live self-determination at work depending on the way they interpret self-determination for themselves. As explained in section 4.3.1. (cf. supra pp.55-57), Swiss Life’s purpose translates into “actively shaping your career” for the employee. Many employees, however, see self-determination in terms of freely deciding how, where, and when they work. As Swiss Life always puts the common objectives of the company and the team over those of the individual employee (Swiss Life, n.d.-c), employees will never have the possibility to decide on every parameter of their work life. Making this point clear to employees should thus be a priority for Swiss Life to avoid frustration among employees.

For C. Georis, it is important to explain the two sides of the purpose; what it means for the client, but also what it means for the employee. She points out that the marketing manager has tried to explain during a meeting that self-determination does not mean that “employees can do what they want”. However, this communication is one that should be handled with care as a purpose always creates certain expectations among employees. If self-determination is the company’s purpose, it cannot only be strived after for the customer. Especially if the social contribution of the purpose is not so big that it would, in itself, be enough to fully engage employees, the purpose should bear some direct benefits for the employees to secure their engagement. Considering the Private

Wealth business, the customer for which the company is enabling self-determination and financial security is oftentimes a client that is already quite well off. Understandably, serving such a client has a lower engagement potential for the employee than, for instance, standing up for the self-determination of a discriminated community.

As was explained through Deci and Ryan's self-determination theory, employees wish for competence, autonomy, and relatedness. Fortunately, many of those needs are already addressed in SL's cultural transformation strategy. A leadership in which employees are trusted and empowered, for instance, leads to autonomy. Collaboration initiatives support relatedness. And the promotion of employee development and the setting of ambitious tasks improve competences. Therefore, if the plan of the cultural transformation is followed thoroughly, nothing should stand in the way of employee's self-determination. Swiss Life just has to make sure that employees are aware of all the existing possibilities to enhance their self-determination at work. Employees mostly think that there are in a favorable environment, but they do not have the full picture of the initiatives through which Swiss Life is already promoting their self-determination (such as training courses, well-being initiatives and pension plans). This is where internal communication must come in. To promote the culture and make sure employees are well-informed about the existing possibilities.

4.4. About Internal Communication at Swiss Life Global Solutions

The fourth section of the case study deals with Swiss Life Global Solutions' internal purpose communication. The goal of this section is to understand how the company communicates the purpose and how employees feel about this way of communication. To understand the underlying principles of SLGS' purpose communication, one must however first examine the "purpose journey" as it was foreseen by the Group and the guidelines that the Group defined for the communication of the purpose.

4.4.1. What does the purpose journey look like?

Looking at the general outline of Swiss Life's purpose journey, bringing the purpose to life has been defined as a four-step process. The first two steps "discover" and "articulate" are the core of *Swiss Life 2018*, the group-wide strategy for the years 2016, 2017, and 2018. Those steps are dedicated to the discovery of a purpose that matches the business and the phrasing of this purpose in a sentence. In the year 2018, the purpose was first presented. The next step, "activate" is put into practice in *Swiss Life 2021*, the strategy for the years 2019, 2020, and 2021. The last step "embed" starts after 2021. As the case study of Swiss Life Global Solutions mostly refers to the years 2021 and 2022, the internal communication actions that are studied below have the goal of either "activating" or "embedding" the purpose. This makes sense in relation to the research question as the last two stages are also those in which employees' engagement is required the most.

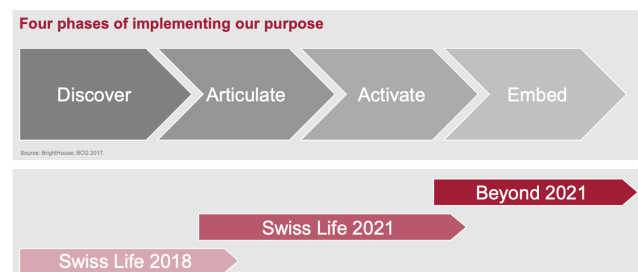


Figure 10: Swiss Life Purpose Journey 2017-Beyond 2021

Source: Pfister, C. (2021) *Purpose 'Swiss Life 2024' ExB Workshop May 2021*.

As shown by figure 12, the activation phase of the purpose goes through different stages. In the year 2019, the purpose is launched under the slogan *self-determined life*. After the launch, the communicative focus is put on the customer to show stakeholders how Swiss Life's purpose positively impacts its clients. As explained by the group, "the purpose is about observing self-determination from day to day and structuring the lives of our customers with the support of good advice, financial planning, risk protection, investment solutions and future provisions. This allows to meet our customers' comprehensive and far-reaching needs related to self-determination." (Swiss Life, n.d.-d).

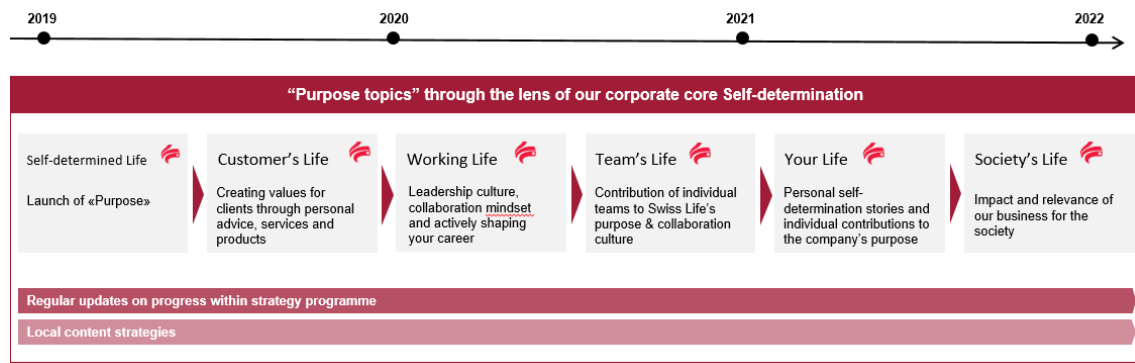


Figure 11: Purpose Topics in the Purpose Journey

Source: Swiss Life. (2020a). *Purpose Journey: Outlook 2020 with focus on Working Life*. [PowerPoint Presentation].

The third stage relates to Swiss Life’s culture (cf. section 4.3.1.) and the internal transposition of the purpose, namely *actively shaping your career* which explains how self-determination should be understood for the employee. The fourth stage “Team’s Life” encourages employees to think about their team’s contribution to the Swiss Life purpose and the company’s collaboration culture. The fifth stage addresses the employee’s individual purpose. In this stage, communications focus on personal self-determination stories and individual contributions to the company’s purpose. The last stage refers to Swiss Life’s contribution to the society. This is where sustainability increasingly comes into focus.

4.4.2. What are the Group’s requirements for communicating the purpose?

From a communicative aspect, the Swiss Life purpose of *the longer self-determined life* is flanked by the two topics of *longer life* and *financial confidence*. Whilst communication strategies, shortly before and after the introduction of the Swiss Life purpose mostly focused on the longevity debate, the group-wide communication strategy for SL2021 focuses on the thematic field of financial confidence. While this does not mean that the topic of the *longer life* is dropped, it is deliberately de-emphasized to put additional focus on financial confidence (Swiss Life, n.d.-e). The communication strategy for SL2021 is believed to enhance “communicative opportunities” and better address younger generations who place higher significance on what a company stands for. It provides further directions for content creation and serves as a guideline for various initiatives aiming to render the purpose tangible (Swiss Life, n.d.-e).

Swiss Life’s communicative aim is to include the purpose in around eighty percent of all communication activities. The essential elements of the communication strategy and the guidelines for its implementation are summarized in the model below:

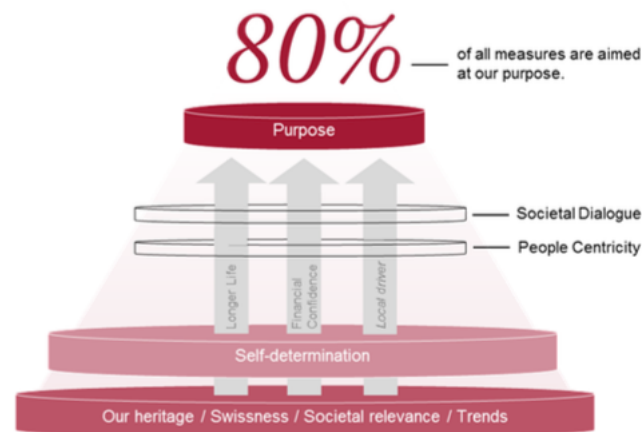


Figure 12: Swiss Life Communication Strategy

Source: Swiss Life. (n.d.-e). *The self-determined life—Our communication strategy for ‘Swiss Life 2021’*.

The base of the communication model is also the foundation for the delivery of purpose. The Swiss Life heritage represents one hundred and sixty years of customer proximity and a sustainable business model oriented to long-term relationships. “Swissness” stands for confidence, quality, and stability. Societal relevance is given through the purpose itself, enabling people to live their life with self-determination, and trends must be observed to allow for the continuous creation of social, emotional, and economic value (Swiss Life, n.d.-e). The purpose, self-determination, is communicated through the topics of “longer life” and “financial confidence”. Additionally, each division can, if desired, define an individual local driver. The aim of the communication strategy is to put people in the center of everything the company does (people centricity) and to create societal dialogue both internally and externally to make sure that the theme of self-determination is not only communicated but also lived (Swiss Life, n.d.-e). The goal is thus to go from storytelling to story-doing (Swiss Life, n.d.-e).

This communication strategy shows Swiss Life’s intention to make the purpose come to life. The communication strategy for SL2021 states: “We want to encourage people to imagine the significance of self-determination for their own lives (imagine). We want to get people to live their own self-determination by preparing themselves (prepare). And we want to get people so enthusiastic with our positive emotional accounts that they are able to enjoy the various aspect of their own self-determination (enjoy).”(Swiss Life, n.d.-b, p.10). The platforms foreseen for Swiss Life’s purpose communication are:

- Talks and appearances
- Internal information and communication
- Customer communication and sales communication
- Positioning the CEOs
- Interviews
- Opinion pieces
- Management leadership communication
- Events (internal and external)
- Official social media channels (Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, YouTube)
- Social media channels of all marketing and communication experts
- Social media channels of key persons on local management teams
- Social media channels of savvy and committed staff in Internal Services and Sales
- Corporate Responsibility/sustainability initiatives and engagements

- Studies
 - Magazines (print)
 - Consulting and product information
 - Every form of advertising
 - Corporate Social Responsibility engagement initiatives
 - Political communication and relationship work
- (Swiss Life, n.d.-e).

As the selection of communication channels suggests, an integral part of the Swiss Life purpose communication relies on internal ambassadors. Through the so-called advocacy program, employee ambassadors use their personal social media accounts to share content provided by the marketing and communication teams (Swiss Life, n.d.-e). Participants in this program are mostly salespeople, as they usually already have the relevant networks, but also other volunteers who are sufficiently sensitized to the purpose (M. L. Dreumont, personal communication, 31 March 2022). To see whether they match the requirements of the program, volunteers participate in a survey and their social media accounts are evaluated by the marketing team. The ambassadors' objective is to publish at least 12 times per trimester (M. L. Dreumont, personal communication, 31 March 2022). As for the content they publish, they have some choice as both the Group and local divisions create content at regular intervals. The Group, for instance, publishes an interview with a prominent personality each month and local marketing teams create articles that are related to their business line or share local (CSR) initiatives (M. L. Dreumont, personal communication, 31 March 2022).

What is important to consider for the creation of content is that the Swiss Life brand personality should always remain consistent and recognizable. The brand personality reflects the focus on self-determination and is supported by the three corporate values of individuality, confidence, and reliability (Swiss Life, n.d.-e). The previous brand claim "The future starts here" is phased out with the new focus on "self-determination", the relevance drivers "longevity" and "financial confidence", as well as the other communicative components (heritage, "Swissness", people centricity, ...) (Swiss Life, n.d.-e). Regarding the Group communications and strategic marketing, the following statement was published in February 2020: "We position Swiss Life and the self-determined life with relevant, credible, and emotional content, both internally and externally. We challenge the management and take responsibility. We think holistically about sustainability and embed it within the company. [...]. We continually develop, find new ideas and implement them courageously and effectively. We take the lead on projects to which people contribute from all over the Group and achieve our goals together" (Swiss Life, 2020b).

Regarding internal communication, it must however be said that the internal purpose communication deviates from the external one in some way. For the in-house perspective, three central points must be considered according to the Group:

- 1) The contribution of the individual, the team, and the company in implementing the purpose and making it palpable for the customer.
- 2) With reference to the individual's contribution, each person's responsibility in working towards solutions with others and actively helping to define them, as well as the responsibility in terms of professional development in accordance with the "Actively shaping your career" initiative.

- 3) The avoidance of the misconception about what is meant by self-determination, namely that every person can do what they want. To that end, the common goals of the company are always placed above those of the individual (Swiss Life, n.d.-d)

For the *Beyond 2021* strategy, the workstreams for internal communication are to move on to the next phase of the employee activation through advocacy approaches and the working with the three perspectives of corporate purpose, team purpose and individual purpose (Swiss Life, 2020c). Additionally, in the context of SL2024, sustainability as a topic further moves into the communicative focus. To make the concepts of purpose and sustainability tangible and visible to employees, Swiss Life wants their people to self-reflect on their team and individual purpose, get a better understanding of what sustainability means, and set concrete purpose and sustainability targets (Swiss Life Global Solutions, 2021). For the self-reflection, the question that the teams should find an answer to is: “How can my team make the purpose more tangible to employees, candidates/new IFAs, clients and partners... in order to create more business?” (Swiss Life Global Solutions, 2021). To get a better understanding of sustainability, a learning platform will be implemented by the Group. And the purpose-linked targets for 2022 are to have a purpose survey participation rate of over 50%¹² and to have over 83%¹³ of participants confirm that “having a company purpose is relevant”. Additionally, over 80%¹⁴ of participants should indicate that the purpose fits to Swiss Life and the purpose should be tangible for over 50%¹⁵ of participants (Swiss Life Global Solutions, 2021).

4.4.3. How is the purpose communicated at Swiss Life Global Solutions?

After having seen the plan for the Swiss Life purpose journey and having learned about the Group’s requirements in terms of communication, it is now time to look at Swiss Life Global Solutions’ internal purpose communication. A first element to highlight in this context is that at SLGS, internal communication is not part of the Marketing & Communication team, but the Human Resources team. As explained by Diane Mersch, human resources took over the internal communication about two years ago, even if this is not the usual organization and it works differently at the Group level (D. Mersch, personal communication, 31 March 2022). In charge of the internal communication in the years in which the case study was conducted, so the second half of 2021 and the first half of 2022, was Christine Georis, Senior HR Officer. And while it was decided in 2022 to hire an Internal Communication Manager, this new person still reports to the Head of Human Resources.

Looking at Global Solutions’ day-to-day internal communication, the most frequently used channels are the company’s intranet (LifeNet), the TV screens around the office, and the company’s newsletter “How’s Life?”. As for purpose communication, the intranet has a section dedicated to the company’s purpose that contains the most essential information on this topic. Additionally, the articles (“news”) published several times a month on the intranet’s homepage also frequently address self-determination. As one might remember from the previous section,

¹² 2021 results: 44% in the International division (INT DIV)

¹³ 2021 results: 81% in the INT DIV

¹⁴ 2021 results: 74% in the INT DIV

¹⁵ 2021 results: 50% in the INT DIV

Swiss Life wants to include the purpose in around 80% of all communications. This is reflected in the news that are published. Typical examples of content for the newsfeed are:

- Promotions of the charity events that the company is participating in or organizing
- Articles about employees whose career achievements nicely fit into the “actively shaping your career” initiative or articles for the “unleash talent” initiative (such as presentations of the new trainees)
- News about the clubs/projects that the company is sponsoring
- Recaps and photos of events organized for partners, clients, and employees.

The TV screens mostly promote the content that has been published on the intranet and encourage people to go have a look. Additionally, the TV screens also display current job offers to promote internal mobility, show pictures of employees that recently joined the company and can address IT or sustainability-related best practices. As for the newsletter, which is sent once a week per email, it is mostly used to share small important information. The “How’s Life” is mostly a HR newsletter, which, for instance, announces new joiners or leavers, but it also contains office management-related content and promotes events. Consequently, all three channels (intranet, TV screens and newsletter) play a role in the company’s purpose communication.

Looking at things in the right order, starting with the launch of the purpose, C. Georis has clarified that the purpose was introduced through a Group-wide publication on the intranet. This publication explained the purpose, however, without many details as it did not contain any explanation of the purpose journey. C. Georis herself mentioned only having understood the logic behind the taken actions once she took over the internal communication and saw the documents related to the purpose journey (cf. figure 12 p.61) (C. Georis, personal communication, 26 April 2022). Consequently, she can imagine that it might have been hard for employees to understand the links between the actions taken in the beginning. In one of the first initiatives, the Group created water bottles with people’s names on them. The divisions were free to come up with a campaign for the distribution of the bottles. At Global Solutions, people could get a bottle after writing something nice about an employee they appreciate. Most people participated, but many did not know that the initiative was linked to the purpose (C. Georis, personal communication, 26 April 2022).

Another initiative emanated from the International Marketing and Communication department that created canvases with each team’s purpose on them. For this project, emails were sent to all teams, asking them to define their team purpose and link it to the company purpose. Suggestions had been sent out to teams in these emails and most teams simply validated the standard proposal without having a team discussion about it. The Marketing and Communication team then printed the definitions on the canvases that were hung in the office. As explained by C. Georis, the employees were not involved in the definition of the team purpose and the canvases only had limited visibility in the office (C. Georis, personal communication, 26 April 2022). When asked how she feels about the way the purpose was introduced, C. Georis points out that it is important to stress why the company has a purpose in the first place and to link actions to the purpose journey to put them into context. She also emphasizes the benefits of having awareness sessions with managers as they are the ones who can make the employees feel the purpose in their everyday work.

Following the logic of the purpose journey, the first two topics addressed in the communication were the “customer’s life” and the “working life”. As the “working life” was touched upon in the

section addressing Swiss Life's cultural transformation (cf. section 4.3.1. p.55-58) and the customer's point of view is not that relevant for the study at hand, the communication related to these steps will not be looked at in detail. The next topic in the purpose communication, namely "team purpose", is much more interesting for the engagement of employees and is also the topic most covered in the timeframe of the case study. This leads us to the summer of 2021 and one of the most important purpose-related internal communication activities at SLGS: the *Team Purpose Summer Parties* (or for simplicity: *Purpose Workshops*). Those workshops were physical team meetings that contained a short brainstorming session about team purpose, followed by a team lunch. The sessions were organized by internal communication and human resources between July and September 2021 and had a relaxed "summer party" atmosphere. The main goal of the meetings was to get employees to think about their team's purpose and to encourage them to come up with two to four commitments that would enable them to contribute to the customers' and partners' self-determination. Additionally, the workshops also served as a purpose awareness action before the Purpose Perception Survey and were destined to motivate people to come back to the office after many months in the home office.

Before the workshops, all teams were asked to brainstorm and define their team role (what it is they do). Based on this definition, the teams were asked to think about their team purpose (why they do what they do) during the workshop. More specifically, the two questions of the workshop were:

- 1) What can we do as a team to make our customers and partners more self-determined?
- 2) How can we support them in fulfilling their basic needs for a financially secure future for themselves and their beloved?

The four levers defined by the Group, which should help employees answer the aforementioned questions are: (1) we know and understand clients' needs, (2) we advise them individually and smartly, (3) we simplify their life and (4) we present all options available.

The outcomes of the workshops, so the commitments that the teams came up with, were then put onto the already existing "team purpose canvases" (from the initiative of the Marketing & Communication department). The *Team Purpose Summer Parties* were organized to make the purpose tangible to employees and to encourage them to think about how they, as a team, could enable the customer's freedom of choice. Coming up with commitments should allow teams to concretely implement the (abstract) purpose into their daily work life. The commitments were added to the canvases (so that employees do not lose them out of sight) and decorations (photos of the event and colorful icons) were added to make the canvases more visually appealing. To see an example of a Team Purpose with the commitments the team defined, please refer to APPENDIX 6.

After the workshops, three other purpose communication actions followed in 2021. Firstly, an online survey in which the employee could choose, among a collection of photos, the photo that best represents self-determination for them. The winning picture then became the new desktop background on all computers. Secondly, a presentation that contained all the team's greatest achievements of the year. And thirdly, Christmas presents with a purpose-related message.

In 2022, in relation to the "Beyond 2021" workstreams, employee advocacy and individual purpose shift into the focus of the internal communication. For the sake of simplicity, the internal communication activities and measures foreseen at Global Solutions for the year 2022 are summarized in the table below:

Individual Purpose Movies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Presentation of one employee's self-determination portrait during the kick-off in January - One self-determination portrait (smartphone videos) each in March, June and September - The CEO's self-determination portrait in December
Summer Team Purpose Workshops	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Virtual workshops to make the link between team purpose and individual purpose
Individual Purpose Banners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Employees are offered personalized banners with their first name that they can add below their email signature ("David's Life")
Individual Purpose Desktop Photo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Employees choose a SL photo that best illustrates individual self-determination. This photo will be the new desktop photo (April)
Christmas Presents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Purpose and sustainability related present with ad-hoc message
Employee Advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Make sure all ambassadors have the Brandvocate app installed on their smartphone - Launch an award program - Include an "active ambassador" objective in their GPS 2022 - Send out a quick survey to current ambassadors to identify the reasons why they are not more active
Employee Advocacy – LinkedIn posts about Employees' Life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Regular content related to the employees' career, hobbies, sports, charity, ... (with the support of internal contributors, HR and employees sharing their or their colleagues' stories & exploits) - Systematic link to purpose & sustainability - Target = minimum eight posts in 2022

Table 1: Purpose Journey 2022 - Activities and Measures

Source: Swiss Life Global Solutions. (2021). *Global Solutions—Purpose Journey 2021 and 2022*.

4.4.4. How do employees see the purpose communication?

Regarding the internal purpose communication at Swiss Life Global Solutions, one question that employees were asked was whose responsibility it is to communicate the company's corporate purpose. For C. Georis, it is a shared responsibility: internal communication should create content and campaigns around the purpose and make sure everyone understands it correctly. HR should link their initiatives to the purpose and use them to create meaning for employees. Line managers should implement the purpose by allowing employees to live the purpose while working. And finally, the CEO and upper management should address the purpose as often as possible to show its relevance and link it to the company's objectives (C. Georis, personal communication, 26 April 2022). This view is also shared by other employees, with upper management's responsibility generally coming up in the first place. However, opinions differ concerning the question of whether management was involved enough in the purpose communication at SLGS. For C. Georis, upper management is not involved enough in the purpose journey, but at the same time, it is difficult to ask them to spend more time on it. Other employees also see it this way and

mention that in their perception, the purpose-related communication mostly only comes from HR. On the other hand, some employees say that the management addresses the purpose often enough and that there is no need to increase the frequency with which the purpose is communicated.

Looking at the launch of the purpose, one thing that becomes apparent is that many employees do not have a precise idea about when and how this happened. To some extent, this is normal because several of the interviewees have only joined the company after the official launch of the purpose. However, even those who have been part of the company for longer have difficulties remembering the official launch. When being asked when they heard about the Swiss Life purpose for the first time, some of the newer employees said they first read about it on the company website when applying for the job or during their interview or onboarding. One employee said they became aware of the purpose during the purpose workshop that took place very shortly after they had joined the company. Another person said they only really learned about the purpose after a year at Swiss Life when they saw some marketing-related documents. The fact that some employees seem to have heard about the purpose earlier than others can be linked to many things (i.e. the point in time they joined the company, the department they work for, the involvement of their manager, ...), but in general, employees who claim that working for a company with a purpose is important for them, also became aware of Swiss Life's purpose earlier. Looking back at the observations made during the *Team Purpose Summer Parties*, it is likely that, independently of the point in time they first heard the purpose statement, this occasion was the first time many employees gave the purpose a real thought.

Talking about the *Team Purpose Summer Parties*, it also became noticeable in the interviews that this was the one purpose-related initiative that stayed in the employee's minds the most. Among the interviewees, everyone that participated in the workshop found it helpful and said they enjoyed discussing the purpose with their colleagues. One employee pointed out: "I liked that we were able to put the company's message into practice. It is good if the purpose is not just something that is communicated, but something we are all involved in. For me, this was the strongest purpose-related communication. This and the communication of the workshop's outcome. I think it is important to do things within the team and to talk about the company's values"¹⁶. Another employee saw the workshops in the same light: "I think the moment at which I received the most explanations regarding the purpose was when we had the purpose workshops with HR. Even if it was mentioned in a few words during the annual kick-off, the workshop was the first real introduction for me".

Besides the purpose workshops, the annual kick-off still seems to be a key moment for purpose communication. Several people mentioned that the purpose usually comes up there; for instance, through videos where managers explain how they implement the purpose for their teams. The initiative with the Swiss Life water bottles and the purpose canvases were also remembered by some. Two employees additionally mentioned the "How's Life" newsletter in the context of the purpose communication. The intranet articles seem to be less impactful than the newsletter. Even though the interviewed employees noticed that the articles are often linked to the company's purpose, several admitted not having the time to look through all the intranet articles. Some people added that they only read the articles linked to the Luxembourgish entity and not so much what is published by the Group. The time factor and the importance of "local" content are thus something to consider when creating purpose-related content.

¹⁶ Translated from French to English

One employee also mentioned that the articles on LifeNet sometimes have a marketing flavor and that it is not always possible for them to identify with the people presented in the posts. The employee in question refers to the celebrity interviews that the Group regularly creates and which are sometimes re-posted on the intranet. The employee much prefers the interviews done with actual colleagues of theirs. To illustrate their point, the employee refers to an article that was created in the context of the International Women's Day: the interview of a female colleague that had decided to reorient herself and did training to switch her career internally. Looking at the engagement rates for said article (likes and comments), it seems like other employees appreciate this type of content too. The article triggered considerably more interaction than previous ones. This type of content is in line with C. Georis' view that you should communicate using an example that illustrates the purpose.

To further evaluate the internal communication's success in making employees understand what the purpose is about, interviewees were asked how they felt about the purpose in the beginning and whether this feeling had changed since then. There were again very different views on the topic. From "the purpose was clear since the beginning" over "the meaning of the purpose was not so clear in the beginning but became clearer over time" to "the purpose is still unclear to me", everything came up. Purely regarding the feeling connected to the purpose, employees, however, seem to associate positive things with the term self-determination. For those who think the purpose is in line with SL's way of working, the feeling remained positive over time. For those who see a gap between the purpose and their work environment, the feeling towards the purpose tended to change. As mentioned by some employees, the Swiss Life purpose is sometimes used to joke about people that leave the company (in the sense that thinking about what they want from life made them want to leave the company). Despite this slightly cynical turn on the purpose, it can, however, not be said that people who use it necessarily have negative feelings towards the company and/ or the purpose.

When employees were asked what is, in their opinion, the most engaging way to communicate purpose, many said that it was best to create physical events where employees can give their input. One employee answered the question as follows: "I think it is important to create face-to-face moments related to the purpose, like the workshops we had. That would have a bigger impact than mentioning it in the intranet or in e-mails. I would try to multiply such interactions to make people understand the company's purpose through brainstorming and workshops". After some reflection they added: "Maybe I would even involve employees in the discovery of the purpose, so that they also feel engaged, and it is not just a concept that comes from management and which they have trouble understanding"¹⁷. Other employees agreed with this idea, saying that the purpose should come from the employees, so bottom-up, even if that could be complex in larger companies. One of the interviewees said that to start to process, one could ask employees to write down how the business is, in their opinion, positively contributing to society.

Regarding the launch of a purpose, another employee explained that it was important to start with a remarkable event that people would remember. To present the purpose, they would create a "modern/ innovative" presentation or video. Then they would dedicate a wall in the office to the purpose so that people would continuously be reminded of it. An additional point that was identified is the importance of the recruitment process. To have engaged employees, one must

¹⁷ Translated from French to English

choose people that fit the purpose. Additionally, the processes and the hierarchy should be designed to support the purpose.

The interviewees also addressed line managers' purpose communication. Many employees stated that their line manager is not addressing the purpose much or only when it is encouraged by human resources or higher management. One employee explained that other things needed to be talked about more urgently in the day-to-day business, but that when it was requested, their line manager would take the time to organize a proper brainstorming. Another employee said that while their manager was not directly addressing the purpose, they were living it and letting their team members live it too. According to the employee: "there is no use in talking about the purpose without living it". Other managers seem to handle it similarly: "[my manager] promotes self-determination and trusts us in the organization of our workload. This flexibility keeps us engaged; I think". For those that answered that their manager is not speaking about the purpose, having them address it more, would only be beneficial if it had practical relevance: "If it remains a theoretical explanation, I do not think that it adds much value, but if [my manager] manages to link it to practical points which make sense in our everyday life, why not?".

As person in charge of the internal communication, C. Georis reveals that there is [at the moment of the interview] not much collaboration between internal communication and team leaders. The challenge for her is to promote internal communication and show that it can bring benefits to everyone. The ideal situation for her would be one in which people proactively seek out the person in charge of internal communication and announce what they want to communicate. That way, it would be possible to put different people in the spotlight and create positive dynamics. She also thinks that one role of internal communication is to help leaders communicate, for instance by making information available to them. One possibility could be to create slides and supporting documentation that would be used by leaders to explain the strategy and how it is implemented at the department level.

After the question related to hierarchical communication followed a question about peer communication. The goal here was to see whether employees talk to their colleagues about the purpose on their own initiative. As it turned out, the interviewed people do not talk about the purpose per se, but they do sometimes address the things the purpose stands for (i.e., flexible working). Additionally, as mentioned before, the purpose is sometimes used to make jokes or support one's point. Regardless of how this is to be evaluated, it shows that the purpose is at least already well-known within the company. Furthermore, having employees talk about the purpose of their own accord must not necessarily be a company's goal. It is however interesting to know whether the idea behind the purpose is already relatively strongly implanted in people's minds.

Finally, a last issue addressed in the interviews was the general state of SLGS' corporate internal communication. For C. Georis, the internal communication is [at the moment of the interview¹⁸] not used to its full potential. According to her, both the internal communication in general and the purpose communication are not sufficiently pronounced, mostly because there is a lack of resources. One way to improve the communication would be by sharing more information about the different businesses. The reason why this is currently not done, is because it is difficult to have access to this kind of information. The internal communicator does not participate in all the meetings and so, it would require employees of other parts of the business to act as

¹⁸ This might change with the hiring of an Internal Communication Manager

communicators. Convincing managers of this idea, however, is not simple (C. Georis, personal communication, 26 April 2022).

4.4.5. Conclusion

While there are some Swiss Life Group requirements for the communication of the corporate purpose, it becomes evident that the divisions have much freedom, especially when it comes to the internal communication of the purpose. This has positive and negative sides. On the one hand, the divisions are free to choose the initiatives they believe could have the greatest impact on their employees. But on the other hand, there also is a risk that some divisions will put more effort into the internalization of the purpose than others. This could lead to noticeable discrepancies between the divisions. Considering that the launch of the purpose is, by many authors, seen as a key moment in the purpose internalization, it might make sense to choose a common approach at least for this moment in the purpose journey. Many SLGS employees do not recall the actual launch of the purpose and even though there was an action coordinated by the Group (water bottles with names), employees did not necessarily associate it with the purpose. Considering that the corporate purpose was first explained through a communication on the intranet, but several employees mentioned that they often do not read those communications, it is not surprising that some seemingly missed the launch.

While talking to the employees, it became evident that physical events seem to be the best approach to involve employees in the discussions around purpose and make them understand and remember the company's corporate purpose. For the launch of the purpose, creating a memorable event consequently also seems to be a preferable option. Many employees see the Team Purpose Summer Parties as their first real point of contact with the purpose. It was thus important to organize those workshops and it would be beneficial if SLGS decided to maintain those workshops over the years. The organization of this event year after year would show the company's commitment and would ensure there is at least one moment per year during which employees can discuss the purpose.

What is noteworthy about Swiss Life's communication strategy is that the company predefined different topics to address in relation to the purpose and put them in chronological order (customer's life – working life – team's life – ...). This provides a common thread for the creation of content and ensures that all topics are covered. Unfortunately, as pointed out by C. Georis, employees were not made aware of this red thread and therefore likely do not understand the logic behind the different initiatives. It might have been interesting to explain the steps of the purpose journey and the desired outcomes at the beginning. That way, employees might have understood that the purpose is a priority for the company and potentially would not see purpose initiatives as a "waste of time" or something that has "nothing to do with the business".

Also interesting in Swiss Life's communication strategy is the goal to include the purpose in around 80% of all communicative measures. This target motivates communication teams to constantly think about new ways to communicate the purpose and to involve it in daily messages. Nevertheless, communication teams should not try to reach this goal by hook or crook. Repeating the purpose is important so that people remember it. But it should not be mentioned so often that people tire of it or added to communications for which the purpose is not relevant. Especially for people that currently do not feel like the purpose is lived within the company, repeatedly hearing

the words can create frustrations. One way to avoid such frustrations would be to create moments in which employees can address their own self-determination. In the context of “Your Life”, employees get the opportunity to reflect on their individual contributions to the company’s purpose. What is, however, missing, is the dimension that addresses their own purpose. The question that employees should answer according to Swiss Life is, “how can my team make the purpose more tangible to employees, candidates/new IFAs, clients and partners... **in order to create more business?**”. In my perception, the question under the title “Your Life”, should however not be “how can you contribute to the business” but “how can your job contribute to your purposeful life?”.

A last point to address in Swiss Life’s purpose communication are the planned communication channels. The previously shown list of channels (cf. supra p.62) shows that there is great diversity for the selection of channels. And while some mostly look like external communication channels, they can be just as relevant for internal communication. Several employees, for instance, mentioned that they closely follow Swiss Life’s posts on LinkedIn (and even more so than the intranet communications). Consequently, it makes sense to consider both the external customer and the internal customer for the creation of LinkedIn content and coordinate with internal communicators. Interesting in terms of engagement is also the SL advocacy program. Turning employees into brand ambassadors does not only benefit the external communication but also the internal one as they are likely to create awareness of the purpose among their colleagues. Quinn & Thakor (2018) highlight the importance of “energizers” in their purpose development framework. By “energizers”, they mean employees who are already very engaged in the company’s purpose and can thus, by setting positive examples, contribute to the engagement of other employees. This is exactly what can happen through advocacy programs. Consequently, it makes sense to put effort into those programs, again through collaboration between internal and external communicators.

4.5. About Employee Engagement at Swiss Life Global Solutions

To assess whether SLGS' communication measures have been successful in engaging employees in corporate purpose, one must find out how engaged employees currently feel. For this research, two different methods have been chosen. First insights were gathered by looking at the results of Swiss Life's Employee Engagement survey and further details were collected through individual interviews.

4.5.1. What conclusions can be drawn from the Employee Engagement survey?

The Employee Engagement survey is a Group-wide employee survey that is conducted every two years in cooperation with the independent research institute Korn Ferry (Swiss Life, n.d.-b). The goal of the survey is to measure employees' engagement and allow them to give feedback on different topics. Participants of the survey are all employees that have an active permanent employment contract, excluding employees on maternity leave and those on notice. The questionnaire consists of a little over forty questions, two of which are open-ended. Nine questions are used to define the two key indexes of engagement and enablement. The engagement index aims to discover employees' level of commitment, loyalty, and willingness to go the extra mile. The enablement index tries to assess whether the work environment is enabling and whether the right people are in the right roles.

The remaining questions enable employees to express their views on topics such as collaboration, confidence in leaders, empowerment, performance management, respect and recognition, strategy and organization, customer orientation, Swiss Life Way of Working, diversity and environmental social governance (Swiss Life Global Solutions, 2022). This section covers the 2021 survey results for Luxembourg, for which the response rate was 93%. The first insight is that the dimension with the highest percent favorable¹⁹ is the "diversity and inclusion" category. Here, the percent favorable lies at 90%. Confidence in leaders scores equally high with a percentage favorable of 89%. The lowest favorable score is in the category ESG/ ethics with 55%. Customer orientation also scores relatively low with a percent favorable of 58% (Swiss Life Group, 2021).

The Engagement Index has a percent favorable of 61% and a percent unfavorable of 16% (cf. figure 14 p.74). Compared to the results from 2019, the percent favorable has decreased by 8 points. Differently put, the percent favorable which now lies at 61, was at 69% in 2019. This makes of the engagement dimension, the dimension with the highest drop compared to the previous engagement survey. To understand why that is so, one must look at the individual parameters that make up the engagement index. The parameters with the highest percent unfavorable are "Given your choice, how long would you plan to continue working for your division", "I feel motivated to do more than is required of me" and "My division motivates me to do more than is required". Additionally, a relatively big drop can be observed for the parameter "I would recommend my division as a good place to work" (Swiss Life Group, 2021).

¹⁹ Percent favorable indicates the percent of positive responses overall (i.e. people that opted for the options "agree" and "strongly agree")

Questions by Dimensions






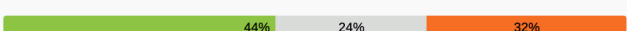
Name	Responses	Distribution	Trend 2019	Swiss Life Group	Your Division	Financials
Engagement			-8	-15	-7	-6
I feel motivated to do more than is required of me.	129		-13	-8	+2	+3
My division motivates me to do more than is required.	129		-13	-10	-6	-3
I feel proud to work for my division.	129		-11	-14	-8	-11
I would recommend my division as a good place to work.	128		-14	-26	-15	-13
*Given your choice, how long would you plan to continue working for your division?	103		+10	-17	-10	-11

Figure 13: Employee Engagement Survey 2021, Engagement

Source: Swiss Life Group. (2021). *EES 2021 Results for: Standard Hierarchy: Market Unit International*. Location: Luxembourg.

When looking at the 2019 trend, it becomes clear that for the parameter “How long would you plan to continue working for your division” considerable improvements have already been made. In the 2021 survey, this parameter is the one which records the highest increase compared to 2019. The parameters “I feel motivated to do more than is required of me”, “My division motivates me to do more than is required” and “I would recommend my division as a good place of work” however record considerable drops compared to the previous survey. All three parameters appear in the listing of the “Top 10 decreases vs 2019”, indicating that action is required in these areas.

Other parameters that appear in the listing of the top 10 decreases and have high unfavorable percentages are:

- “My division shows care and concern for its employees” with a drop of 15 points and a percent unfavorable of 24% (dimension “respect and recognition”),
- “There is good cooperation between departments in my division” with a drop of 13 points and a percent unfavorable of 26% (dimension “collaboration”) and
- “Our processes ensure an excellent experience for our customers” with a drop of 9 points and a percent unfavorable of 47% (dimension “customer orientation”).

Those three parameters do not only show considerable decreases compared to the 2019 trend, but also compared to the results of the Swiss Life Group. For the last parameter (processes that ensure excellent customer experience), there is even a difference of 37 points between Luxembourg and the whole Swiss Life Group. This insight is consistent with some comments from the interviews during which employees said that the purpose does not match the business because the quality of the service is not high enough to enable the client’s self-determination.

Another dimension that is interesting to look at in relation to the purpose is “empowerment” as it could give an indication of whether employees feel self-determined at work. As figure 15 (cf. p.75) depicts, the trend for this dimension is a negative one. Compared to 2019, the percent favorable of the empowerment index has decreased by 6 points and compared to the Group, the parameters “I have enough authority to do my job well” and “I am involved in decisions that affect my work” seems to perform a bit less good in Luxembourg.

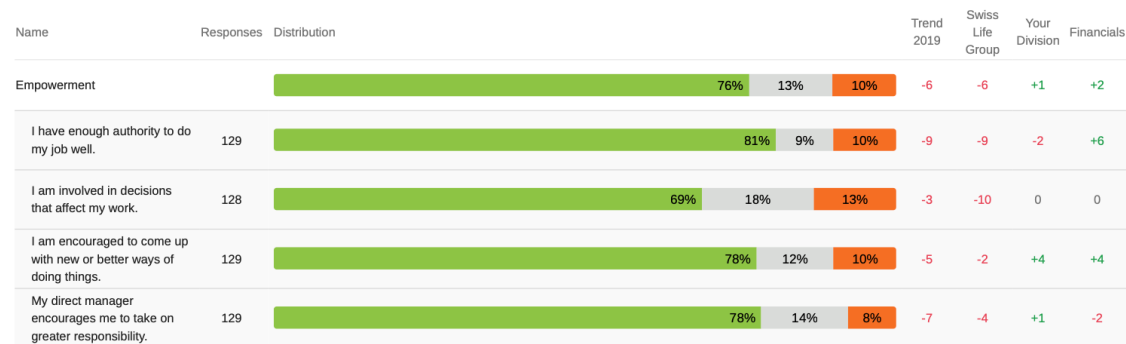


Figure 14: Employee Engagement Survey 2021, Empowerment

Source: Swiss Life Group. (2021). *EES 2021 Results for: Standard Hierarchy: Market Unit International*. Location: Luxembourg.

The final dimension that provides relevant insights for the study of the research question is the “Swiss Life Way of Working” dimension. There is no trend data available for this dimension, but the results for Luxembourg can be compared to the International division and the whole Swiss Life Group. For the statement “I actively contribute to implementing Swiss Life’s purpose, making it tangible both internally and externally”, the percent favorable lies at 73% in Luxembourg. As this percentage is lower than the ones in the International division and the Swiss Life Group, improvements could probably still be made in the involvement of Luxembourg-based employees in the purpose. Nevertheless, the fact that only 5% of respondents negated the statement, is to be taken as a positive sign.

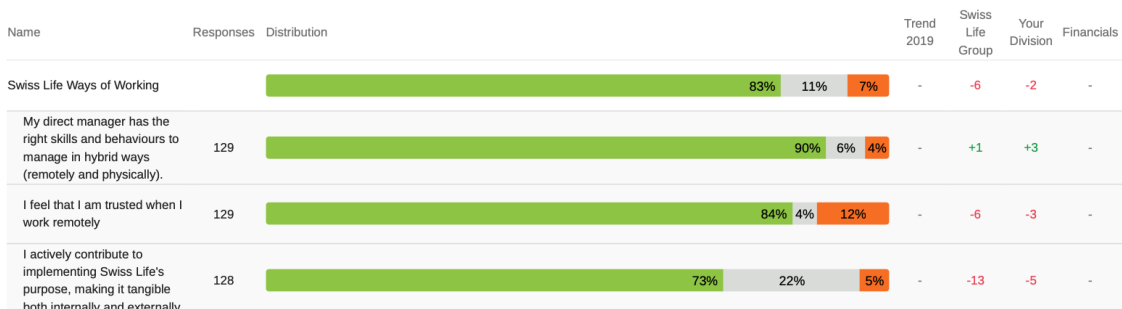


Figure 15: Employee Engagement Survey, Swiss Life Way of Working

Source: Swiss Life Group. (2021). *EES 2021 Results for: Standard Hierarchy: Market Unit International*. Location: Luxembourg.

Interestingly, for the question “what is the one thing your division needs to improve on”, “communication” is mentioned by most, namely 15% of the interviewed. This theme also frequently came up during the team purpose workshops where many teams believed interdepartmental communication should be improved. Other areas for improvement according to the survey are “execution”, “brand and reputation”, “leadership” and “performance and development”.

4.5.2. How engaged do the employees feel in the purpose?

As the Swiss Life Employee Engagement survey determines employee engagement in general and not only in relation to the purpose, the interviews that were conducted in Luxembourg

contained some questions focusing on that topic. The first question simply asked “Do you feel engaged in the Swiss Life purpose? Please explain”. To this question, most interviewees answered that they were because the purpose made sense to them in terms of their personal values. One employee explained that they believed to be engaged because there was a match between the things Swiss Life conveys on the inside and outside and who they were as a person. Another employee explained that they feel engaged in Swiss Life’s values. One of Swiss Life’s values is customer-centricity and for the employee in question, this makes sense as “a company only exists because it has clients” and customers should thus always be the focus. Nevertheless, some employees also mentioned that it was hard for them to completely adhere to the purpose because it was not something they could feel in their daily work. One employee explained that they were by nature an engaged person and always happy to participate in Swiss Life’s charity events, but that more efforts would have to be made to involve employees in the purpose. Said employee concluded with: “I am engaged, but it is not due to Swiss Life’s efforts”. Another employee mentioned that they had some trouble feeling engaged in something that was decided without them, and that they wished more brainstorming sessions would have been done in the beginning.

Another question that was part of the interviews, was whether interviewees saw how the purpose could help them positively impact the business. This question was asked to see whether employees also acted on their claimed engagement or whether their engagement was purely based on “being able to relate to the desire for self-determination”. For one employee from the human resources department, seeing how the purpose could help them positively impact the business was easy. As explained by this person, purpose can be a useful tool in human resources management as it can avoid loss of meaning which would lead to unhappy and unmotivated employees. Additionally, as young candidates increasingly care about a company’s purpose and its values, those are important to attract candidates. Another interviewee stated that for them, the purpose was a way to communicate the company’s values on the outside of the company (to partners, clients, brokers) as well as on the inside.

A third employee saw the purpose’s potential for selling products. According to them, for a purpose to work as a selling argument, it must harmonize perfectly with the company’s products and employees must “live the purpose” so that they can carry its spirit to the outside world. Thinking about selling products, the view that the purpose could drive the development of customized and client-oriented solutions was also expressed. On the opposite side of the arguments, some people mentioned that they would always do their best no matter what purpose Swiss Life had chosen. One employee explained that they could see how a purpose could positively impact a business, namely when the message was very strong and had lots of energy behind it, but that in Swiss Life’s case, they did not believe that people had the purpose in mind while working. Consequently, the impulse to do good work would not come from the purpose but from the team, the hierarchy, or something similar.

In line with the previous question, the interview also contained a question about whether people changed their behavior at work since the introduction of the purpose. Some of the interviewed employees could not answer this question because they only joined the company after the purpose had already been introduced. Two employees clearly stated that they did not change anything about their behavior at work. One employee that has been at Swiss Life for a very long time said that they believed people started thinking about their values and their work-life balance more. This insight was confirmed by one of Swiss Life’s human resources officers as they now see more people that are working part-time, even leaders.

4.5.3. Conclusion

Regarding employees' engagement in the corporate purpose, some interesting conclusions can be drawn from the employee engagement survey. It has been mentioned in section 4.4.5 that when it comes to purpose, it is important to not only consider how the employee can support the business through the purpose but also how the purpose can help the employee be more satisfied with their life at work. It was criticized that too much emphasis is put on how the purpose can make the business grow and too little emphasis on how the employee's individual purpose relates to the company purpose. The fact that the parameters "I feel motivated to do more than is required of me", "My division motivates me to do more than is required" and "My division shows care and concern for its employees" record considerable drops compared to 2019, might support this view. While it is possible that the lower motivation levels are entirely due to the extraordinary circumstances of the Covid-19 pandemic in the years 2020 and 2021, it should not be forgotten that the pandemic also brought about conditions that should actually have motivated employees. Homeworking, for instance, has been wished for by many and is now enjoying increasing acceptance within the company. Independently of the reasons for the drop, the purpose should be seen as a chance to motivate employees and give them the feeling that the company cares about them. This inevitably goes through the consideration of people's individual purposes.

The drop of the parameters "I have enough authority to do my job well" and "My manager encourages me to take on greater responsibility" shows that through the embedding efforts of the purpose, expectations for self-determined working were created among the employees. If those expectations are not fulfilled, it is unlikely that the parameters will increase again in the coming years. To engage employees, it is thus important to act upon the expectations that the purpose creates, even if the company sees the purpose in a different light than the employees ("actively shaping your career" vs "self-determined working"). This insight hints toward the limits of the use of communication to engage employees. The one parameter which has a huge impact on employees' engagement in SL's case, namely the organization of the work, is decided upon by management. Communicators can point toward the way in which the employees are already enjoying self-determination at work, but they cannot bring about structural change. At maximum, they could take advantage of their role as business advisors to make the management aware of the issue at hand.

From the interviews with SLGS employees, another insight that emerged is that those who understand how the purpose can help them positively impact the business, more often report that they are engaged in the purpose than those who do not. Consequently, making people understand how the purpose allows them to support the business is a key element in the purpose communication. At Swiss Life, this issue is addressed in the context of "Your Life". Unfortunately, neither the Employee Engagement Survey nor the interviews allow to conclude that employees are more engaged since the introduction of the purpose. However, the Purpose Perception Survey demonstrated that the purpose is, at least, seen as a motivational factor by a majority of employees (64%). Only 22% agree with the statement that the purpose does not influence their personal engagement.

5. Insights from Allianz

To get a richer and less one-sided view on the topic of purpose internalization, it seems unavoidable to compare Swiss Life's approach to one of another, yet comparable company. Allianz was chosen for this purpose as the company is operating in the same industry and has a comparable structure, even if the Allianz Group is bigger in size and operating in more markets than Swiss Life. According to the Allianz website, the Allianz Group is one of the world's leading insurers and asset managers, serving 126 million private and corporate customers in more than 70 countries (Allianz, 2022a). For comparison, the number of Swiss Life clients lies at 4 million (Swiss Life, n.d.-f). Interesting about the company Allianz is that it is headquartered in Munich, Germany. As Germany and Switzerland are culturally close, this gives reason to believe that the corporate cultures of both companies are also similar and that there is not much difference in the value assigned to corporate purpose. These are good preconditions to compare the purpose approaches of both companies.

As the focus of this thesis does not lie on Swiss Life as the Group, but Swiss Life Global Solutions (SLGS), and more specifically SLGS in Luxembourg, the study related to Allianz also only focuses on Allianz Benelux. To collect data about the purpose internalization process at Allianz, an interview was conducted with Laura Vening, Communication Expert at Allianz Benelux and her colleague Eva Langemaat in May 2022. The interview (see APPENDIX 7: Interview Guide for the Interview with L. Vening and E. Langemaat from Allianz) was semi-directed and the goals were first and foremost to find out who was involved in the definition and communication of the Allianz purpose and what actions were undertaken to target employees' involvement in the purpose. Nevertheless, before coming to the insights of the interview, let us look at some key facts about the Allianz Group to get a general understanding of the company's organization.

5.1. About the Allianz Group

The Allianz Group is a financial services provider that has subsidiaries in many parts of the world. Allianz was founded in 1890 in Berlin and nowadays has its headquarters in Munich. The company counts about 155 thousand employees which, in 2021, generated a turnover of 149 billion euros and an operating profit of 13.4 billion euros. 24% of the profit is associated with the German market and 25% with West and South Europe (Allianz SE, 2022). The remaining profit was generated in the United States, growth markets²⁰, Anglo markets²¹, and specialty insurance²² (Allianz SE, 2022). Allianz services include property and casualty insurance, health and life insurance, asset management, business insurance, trade credit insurance, and surety bonds (Allianz, 2022b). Allianz SE is the holding company of the Allianz Group to which the individual subsidiaries are associated. Allianz Benelux is one of those subsidiaries. To get a better understanding of the company structure, please refer to APPENDIX 8: Simplified Structure of Allianz Group as of December 31, 2021.

²⁰ Central and Eastern Europe, Asia-Pacific, Latin America, Middle East and Africa, Turkey Austria and Allianz Direct allocated to Western and Southern Europe

²¹ UK, Ireland, Australia

²² Allianz Global Corporate & Specialty, Euler Hermes Allianz Partners, Allianz Re

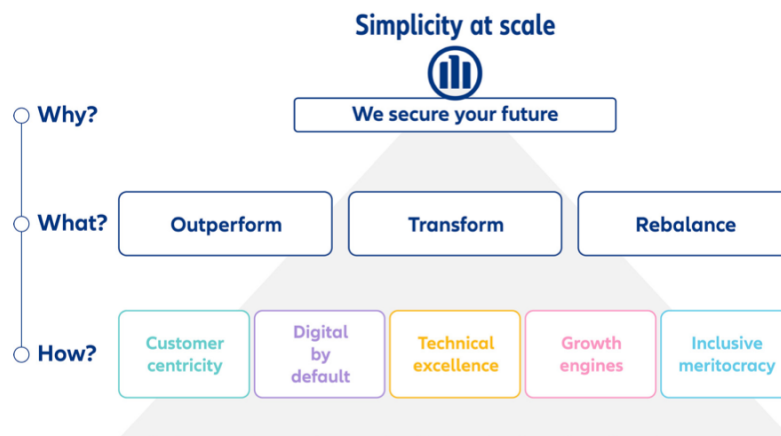


Figure 16: Allianz Strategy

Source: Allianz SE. (2022). *Allianz Fact Sheet*.

https://www.allianz.com/content/dam/onemarketing/azcom/Allianz_com/about-us/who-we-are/at-a-glance/de-2022-03-fact-sheet.pdf

The Allianz medium-term strategy that is depicted in figure 18 is based upon the three questions “Why?”, “What?” and “How?”. It was developed under the motto “Simplicity at scale” to simplify the company. The “Why” is the company’s purpose “We secure your future”. According to the Allianz sustainability report 2021, this purpose drives the company to “shape a better tomorrow where people have more hope than fear through constant innovation and collaboration” (Allianz SE, n.d.). The “What” are the three pillars “outperform”, “transform” and “rebalance”. *Outperform* refers to the wish of moving ahead of the competition to drive profitable growth. *Transform* expresses the ambition of becoming both simpler and deeply digital and putting scalability at the heart of actions. Finally, *rebalance* translates into building leading positions in large, profitable, and fast-growing geographies as well as in new areas of business. The “How” are five principles for action: customer centricity, digital by default, technical excellence, growth engines, and inclusive meritocracy (Allianz SE, 2022).

The ambition of Allianz, according to their website, is to “accompany” people in their lives and give them “the courage to go forward”(Allianz, 2022b). This goal of giving people the “courage” or “confidence” to live their lives might sound familiar as it has also been an important lever in the Swiss Life purpose.

5.2. About Purpose Communication at Allianz

The Allianz purpose “**We secure your future**” was launched around the same time as Swiss Life’s purpose namely in 2019. According to Laura Vening, communication expert at Allianz Benelux, the decision to define a purpose for the Group was taken for differentiation reasons about two years prior to this launch (L. Vening & E. Langemaat, personal communication, 9 May 2022). Involved in the definition of the purpose were the communication department at the head office and several marketing departments of other market units. In the beginning, the head office also organized a survey so that colleagues around the world could give their feedback on the chosen statement. Before the purpose was introduced externally, it was first communicated internally in all departments. Regarding the organization of communication at Allianz, internal and external communication belong to the same team. Human resources have their own communication (with their own platform), but for some topics, for instance, internal policies, there are also multidisciplinary teams where HR collaborates with internal communication.

After a few months of only using the purpose “We secure your future” for communications, the brand promise “Behind you for what’s ahead” was added for advertising. Internally, “We secure your future” is still used and human resources additionally use the slogan “Let’s care for tomorrow” for their communications (L. Vening & E. Langemaat, personal communication, 9 May 2022). Like Swiss Life with “Actively shaping your career”, Allianz has thus found a translation of the purpose at the HR level. As explained by E. Langemaat, “We secure your future” is what is used to make the employee (the internal customer), think about what the external customer needs. The HR brand promise “Let’s care for tomorrow” is purely about the internal customer. This is again very similar to Swiss Life for which “Enabling people to lead a self-determined life” should first and foremost make the employee think about the customers’ self-determination.

The way in which employees heard about the purpose for the first time was through a message on the intranet. This message explained what the purpose was and why it was introduced. Very soon after that, all entities were asked to form a “Purpose & Strategy Squad” that is acting as purpose ambassador. The squad is made up of representatives from regional communication and human resources departments as well as the regional CEO’s office. The people in this squad have to think about ways to promote the purpose and mostly come together when it is requested by the Group or regional management. Since 2020, Allianz has an annual “Purpose & Strategy Day” that is organized by the squad. The theme for the first *Purpose & Strategy Day* was “what gets you out of the bed in the morning”. That day, people came to the office in their pajamas and had breakfast together. Employees then received flyers where they had to write down what their purpose is, what makes them come to work and how they can secure the future. Furthermore, employees also participated in a workshop where they discussed their team’s contribution to the purpose. In 2021, due to Covid, the *Purpose & Strategy Day* was held on an online platform. The theme for that year was “customer experience”, so there were different presentations about that topic. The CEO also gave a speech about the purpose and there were activities in different online rooms so that people could get to know each other. In 2022, the theme will be “cultural change” (L. Vening & E. Langemaat, personal communication, 9 May 2022).

The Purpose & Strategy Day is surely the most important tool when it comes to the internal activation of the purpose at Allianz, but the intranet and TV screens are also used to communicate

the purpose. Additionally, there is a wall in the restaurant that has the purpose statement on it to remind people of it every day. Senior management also sometimes addresses the purpose during Town Hall meetings. One type of content created for the intranet were customer stories, so essentially stories of colleagues explaining how they secured a customer's future. As the purpose is translated into strategic objectives every year, those objectives can also be communicated over the intranet. The objectives in question are based on the company's "what" pillars (outperform, transform, and rebalance) that emerge from the company strategy (L. Vening & E. Langemaat, personal communication, 9 May 2022).

Regarding feedback on the purpose communication, employees are invited to participate in a survey that takes place after the Purpose & Strategy Day. Here, employees can say whether they liked the activities that were organized and this is also the moment to give input regarding the purpose itself (L. Vening & E. Langemaat, personal communication, 9 May 2022). Furthermore, in the annual engagement survey, one parameter measures whether the purpose is clearly communicated. Results from different entities can then be compared to each other,

Concerning the question of whose responsibility it is to communicate the purpose, both E. Langemaat and L. Vening are of the opinion that a big part of it should be done by management. First by senior management and then by team managers who must translate the purpose into something that is meaningful for employees in their daily job. Communication teams come in as a support to make sure that everyone understands the purpose correctly. Additionally, as the intranet of Allianz has a page that is dedicated to the purpose, internal communicators should, according to L. Vening, also make sure that this page is regularly updated. Both L. Vening and E. Langemaat think that the frequency at which upper management addresses the purpose at Allianz could be improved. E. Langemaat mentions that the entity's engagement score is quite high, but she still doubts that everyone in the company would be able to spontaneously cite the purpose correctly if asked to do so. The question for her, however, is whether that is something that should be strived for. At Allianz, internal communicators do not have a target they have to reach when it comes to the purpose communication and there is also no specific communication strategy linked to it. The main part of the purpose communication consists in organizing the *Purpose & Strategy Day* and being reactive to Group demands (L. Vening & E. Langemaat, personal communication, 9 May 2022).

The collaboration between the HR and internal communication teams is, according to E. Langemaat, quite good. Both teams are on the Purpose squad and there is also much collaboration in the communication of internal policies and Allianz ways of working. Interestingly the driver for the *Purpose & Strategy Day* also comes from HR, or more precisely HR Transformation. In general, L. Vening and E. Langemaat think that the purpose is well-anchored into the business, even though some improvements could still be made (i.e. for the on-boarding of new colleagues who should categorially be made aware of the purpose). The fact that the survey indicates that 70% of the surveyed employees are aware of the purpose is already to be taken as a positive sign for E. Langemaat. L. Vening adds that people are slowly realizing that the purpose is there to stay. Moreover, the fact that the purpose is used expressly internally and that there is a different sentence for marketing, shows that there is a great willingness in the Allianz Group to really engage employees in and through the purpose (L. Vening & E. Langemaat, personal communication, 9 May 2022). According to E. Langemaat, there are not a ton of questions in the engagement survey. The fact that the Group dedicated four questions to purpose and strategy (for

instance, “does your manager communicate clearly about the purpose”, “do you understand the purpose and can you relate to it”, ...) makes it even more meaningful.

Moreover, Allianz, like Swiss Life, also initiated a cultural transformation program. As explained by E. Langemaat, the ideal culture for Allianz would be one in which people have fun at work and collaborate a lot. For E. Langemaat, the culture is hands-down and welcoming, but further improvements must be made in terms of collaboration. As the company still works in silos, collaboration between business units can sometimes be a bit harder. Another focus of Allianz (also similar to Swiss Life) is customer-centricity through digital tools. For E. Langemaat, this perfectly aligns with the story of the purpose (L. Vening & E. Langemaat, personal communication, 9 May 2022).

The last questions of the interview with the Allianz communicators asked for their personal opinions. Firstly, regarding the best way to engage employees in corporate purpose, and secondly regarding internal communication’s potential to create employee engagement. They both agreed that the best way to engage employees in the purpose would be to create physical get-togethers and events. E. Langemaat says that it would be good to make employees discover the purpose by themselves without telling them about the purpose statement first. Employees should discover the purpose only by thinking about the core of the business. The exercise could be made using posters and sticky notes so that everyone can put up their ideas. For L. Vening using client stories is also a very good way to engage employees. She mentions the example of a client who had a bad experience with Allianz and initially complained a lot. But then things turned around with this client and they were very satisfied. This testimonial can motivate employees to do their best when serving the client. Furthermore, communication must be interactive. People do not always have the time to read everything and so it is important to draw their attention to important messages. Nevertheless, the red line should not be lost. Sometimes there can be too many initiatives and then things can get overwhelming for employees (L. Vening & E. Langemaat, personal communication, 9 May 2022).

For internal communication’s potential to create engagement, L. Vening believes that without communication, engagement is not possible. People need to be updated and communication can give them a sense of what is important for the company. Especially when working in a hybrid way, communication is essential to make people relate to the brand. Combining top-down with bottom-up communication is the way to get people enthusiastic about their job. Allianz for instance works with employee networks where employees can discuss topics like purpose, inclusion, etc. This is one way to make sure employees feel involved in the discussions (L. Vening & E. Langemaat, personal communication, 9 May 2022).

5.3. Key Takeaways from the Allianz Approach

When comparing Swiss Life's approach to the one of Allianz, it becomes clear that there are many parallels between the two companies. Both companies differentiate between internal and external purposes and use separate slogans for the external and the internal customer. Additionally, as both companies primarily defined a purpose for differentiation reasons and are customer-focused, the emphasis is on making internal customers (employees) think about what they can do for the external customer. Other parallels can be found for the definition and the launch of the purpose. The purpose statement comes from the head office, but input is asked from the communication teams of the different entities. Employees are not involved in the discovery of the *raison d'être* and only learn about it later through a communication on the intranet. What is however striking in the case of Allianz, is that the company very quickly decided to introduce a third phrase that is only used for marketing reasons. The question is whether this was the company's attempt to stop people from seeing their higher purpose as a mere marketing statement.

Another interesting point in the communication strategy of Allianz is the creation of a *Purpose & Strategy Squad*. Studying the case of SLGS, one is under the impression that the HR team, and thus the internal communication team, has been involved rather late in the internalization process of the purpose. This can be problematic for the engagement of employees. Creating a purpose squad, that from the outset, brings together representatives from HR, management, and internal and external communication, ensures that the teams collaborate and that everything is decided and implemented together. That way, every action can simultaneously consider the internal, external, and business perspectives. Also interesting is the Allianz *Purpose & Strategy Day* which is the cornerstone of the company's internal communication. Having such a day can be beneficial for employees' engagement because they know that it takes place every year and this both shows them that the purpose is there to stay and gives them something to look forward to. The summer purpose workshops at SLGS could fulfill a similar function within the company as the 2021 edition was highly appreciated by all of the interviewed employees. To achieve the same effect, the company must however keep organizing the event every year and create a recognition factor by keeping it under a similar format over the years. As mentioned by many employees, in-person events in a relaxed, non-meeting atmosphere are appreciated the most.

What was also noticeable in the communication strategy of Allianz, was that the company, contrarily to SL, first started with the employee's perspective ("what gets you out of bed in the morning?") before moving on to the external customer's point of view the following year. Maybe thinking about one's personal purpose first and seeing how that aligns with the company's purpose is more engaging than directly thinking about "what more can I do to satisfy the client?". After all, the purpose should never feel like an additional burden to the employee (cf. dangers of over-engagement). What can be seen as more problematic in the communication strategy of Allianz, is the fact that besides the Purpose & Strategy Day, there are not many other actions foreseen throughout the year. The Purpose & Strategy Squad only meets when it is requested by the Group or regional management and there is no specific internal communication planning with activities and targets. As the perception of the purpose is part of the company's Engagement Survey, there are certainly parameters to work on throughout the year, but it did not become clear in the interview how exactly this is achieved and what role the internal communication plays in this. As was described in the theoretical part of the thesis, it is important to fix and reach targets in internal communication to legitimize the resources attributed to the chosen activities.

6. Research Results

6.1. What internal communication can and should do to engage employees in corporate purpose

Both the theoretical research and the practical study at Swiss Life showed that there are some ways in which internal communicators can contribute to employee engagement and especially employees' engagement in corporate purpose. The concept of purpose has something inherently "engaging" as human beings need a sense of purpose and self-fulfillment. Nevertheless, even if people naturally look for meaning in their work, engagement in a company's purpose is not necessarily automatic for everyone. As the Swiss Life purpose shows, purpose statements come in varying degrees of complexity and can be difficult to translate. If employees do not fully understand the purpose or do not see its link to their daily work, they are unlikely to engage. Much of the communicator's responsibility thus lies in "reducing the abstractness of the purpose" and explaining the link between the purpose and the business. At Swiss Life, the link between self-determination and the insurance business has been thoroughly explained in marketing/communication-related documents. Employees that do not have access to those documents are, however, likely to have trouble fully understanding the said link. Especially when dealing with a less intuitive purpose, but also in general, internal communicators should focus on making everyone understand the purpose well. Understandably, there cannot be commitment without understanding.

Additionally, as new people steadily join the company, the purpose must be re-explained at constant intervals. Section 3.1.2. (cf. supra pp. 40-41) stated that a company's purpose journey is "never over" because a company can never stop communicating its purpose. When considering the issue of new joiners, this statement fully applies to internal communication. To familiarize new joiners with the purpose, it would, according to L. Vening from Allianz, make sense to systematically address the purpose in onboarding programs. This step could be seen as an HR responsibility; however, HR and internal communication could also collaborate for the development of a program that best familiarizes new employees with the purpose. When setting up programs of this kind, one should keep in mind that according to the study by Cézanne et al. (2019) and according to SLGS employees, participative approaches work best to engage employees. For the onboarding sessions, interactive brainstorming sessions could thus be considered. One interesting approach, suggested by L. Vening from Allianz, would be to let people think about the meaning of the purpose themselves before giving them the actual explanation. If people have to think about the interpretation of the purpose first, they are more likely to understand and remember it afterwards.

Another way in which internal communicators can drive engagement is by encouraging employees to think about their individual purpose and how this purpose matches the company's purpose. Employees look for alignment between their role and their self-concept (Imperatori, 2017). If this alignment is given, they are much more likely to report high engagement levels. At Allianz, people's individual purpose was considered at the very first *Purpose & Strategy Day*. At Swiss Life, the employee's individual purpose is also addressed, but only at a later point in the communication strategy. For this step of the communication strategy, SLGS, for instance, decided to create "individual purpose movies" which present the self-determination portrait of several

employees and the CEO. Considering that employees especially appreciate content about their colleagues (according to the case study), this could be a successful approach. Nevertheless, the power of participative communication should, again, not be neglected. For Cézanne et al. (2019) participation practices are idea boxes, company newspapers, quality actions, company projects, seminars, and employee satisfaction surveys. Dhanesh (2021) further sees a positive contribution in the use of “experimental” CSR programs to build purposeful organizations. At SLGS, events like the *Rock Against Cancer* concert and the “*Relais pour la Vie*” are integral parts of the purpose communication and the internal communicator has a responsibility of promoting those events among the internal public.

Regarding participative communication and employee involvement, one should also remember that some employees wish to be involved in the discovery of the purpose. If internal communicators take part in the discovery of the purpose (which would be the ideal case), they should see this as an opportunity to consider the employee’s point of view from the outset. Companies that decide to define a purpose for differentiation reasons, run the risk of choosing a purpose that is mostly directed towards the external client. Internal communicators should speak up for the internal client so that the purpose can be equally attractive to them. Additionally, the internal communicator could try to involve the employees as best as possible in the discovery process. While this seems logistically difficult to organize in large companies, internal communicators could find ways to give employees the feeling of being part of the process, for instance by organizing optional discussion rounds or motivating employees to send in their ideas. Furthermore, internal purpose communication should not only start when the purpose has already been decided on. Employees should be informed in advance that the company decided to think about its purpose. At the very minimum, companies should make an effort to explain to employees where the purpose is coming from. Companies should clarify how the purpose was discovered to show that it is not “invented”, but that it existed before and represents what the company really does. Implying employees is unavoidable, the earlier in the process it is done the better.

As touched upon, the reason a company decides to launch a purpose influences the purpose itself. However, it also influences how the purpose is presented within the company. The communication strategy that the internal communicator puts into place should thus consider the company’s purpose structure. For the purpose-supported differentiation (structure of Swiss Life and Allianz), the launch of the purpose is not accompanied by disruptive measures and important transformation. Accordingly, the introduction of the purpose might go unnoticed by some employees. To avoid this, communicative measures must attract people’s attention. The study at SLGS revealed that the intranet should not be the only communication channel employed to announce and explain the purpose. While the intranet is an important communicative tool and should have a section that addresses the purpose, it must be considered that not every employee will closely follow what is published. Adding further communication channels is thus preferable. Creating a memorable event around the purpose such as the *Allianz Purpose & Strategy Day* seems to go down well with employees. Considering the importance that employees give to management communication, a speech by the CEO can be equally powerful. Furthermore, additional communication via company newsletters and TV screens decreases the likelihood of missed messages.

For those who plan on establishing a more advanced communication strategy, considering the differences between business lines might also be an idea. At SLGS, differences in the engagement levels became visible between the Employee Benefits and the Private Wealth (PW) businesses.

While this state certainly has various reasons (some entirely unrelated to the purpose), it still seems worthwhile to consider why employees struggle more with seeing the link between the purpose and the PW business. To counteract the trend at Swiss Life, a few communication campaigns should probably focus on the PW business. Another insight from the Swiss Life case study was that if a company differentiates between an internal and an external interpretation of the purpose, communication should be designed so that employees understand this difference well. Employees must know how the purpose is to be understood for them as individuals (not them as employees servicing clients) and how this is different from the way the purpose is interpreted for clients. To make the difference clearer, some companies use different slogans internally and externally. However, one should be careful not to create confusion among the employees. Some struggle remembering even one statement. In any case, the slogans should visibly represent the same idea so that employees can make the connection between the two and see that they both represent the company's (unique) purpose (Allianz example: "*behind you for what's ahead*" and "*we secure your future*"). Furthermore, employees should also know what is expected from them in terms of the purpose. If employees are, for instance, expected to pass the purpose on to the company's customers, they must be taught how to do this.

When drafting a communication strategy, one must, of course, also think about ways to measure the success of the said strategy. Internal communicators should thus find indicators that can track the progress made in terms of purpose internalization. One of the easiest and most effective ways to do this is by listening to employees and asking for their feedback. For Malek and Yazdanifard (2012), establishing feedback processes is one of the functions of internal communication. This also goes for purpose communication. At SLGS, the communication team opted for a Purpose Perception Survey. This survey does not only allow communicators to assess the effectiveness of their strategy but also gives employees the feeling of being involved. Besides the feedback processes, it could also be considered to set clear targets such as the Swiss Life target to link 80% of all communication to the purpose or a target linked to interactions (likes and comments) on the intranet. However, such indicators could lead the internal communicator to mention the purpose even when it is not relevant to the message that is being mediated. This should be avoided as one does not want the employees to tire of the purpose. As several SLGS employees have mentioned in the interviews, they only wish to hear of the purpose when it is linked to the message. In no case should measuring the success of the communication strategy lead to "Indicator-itis" (Rey & Bastons, 2019). According to Rey and Bastons (2019), "purpose measurement requires using metrics to evaluate its fulfillment but also understanding that the legitimacy of measurement is always sustained by the purpose itself" (p.35). Measurement can thus never become an end in itself or else it detracts from the sense of the purpose.

Another responsibility of internal communication when it comes to a company's purpose is the "unleashing of positive energizers" (Quinn & Thakor, 2018). A company always has employees that are already purpose-driven and who can be a great source of inspiration to others. The internal communicator must find those people and tell their stories or encourage them to become ambassadors. The case study at SLGS revealed that employees are interested in what their colleagues have to say and that they are much more likely to follow and engage with content that tells stories about people they know. Seeing how others interpret the purpose for themselves and live accordingly can motivate employees to do the same. In that way, presenting the case of engaged employees can also support the cultural shift. Employee Advocacy programs, like the one Swiss Life put in place, further have the advantage that they make employees feel more

involved in the purpose. By posting content on their own LinkedIn profiles, employees can be part of purpose communication and support corporate communications.

The last possibility in which internal communication can contribute to the employees' engagement in a corporate purpose is by promoting the company's culture and especially those aspects that align with the purpose. The Swiss Life case study revealed that employees who see the corporate culture as being in accordance with the purpose, feel more engaged in the purpose than other employees. The communicator should thus highlight in what ways the culture matches the purpose by communicating the corporate values and motivating people to take part in existing initiatives. Understandably, one should only focus on the projects and initiatives that make sense in relation to the purpose to avoid overwhelming or confusing employees. In Swiss Life's case, the things that one would focus on would, for instance, be policies related to New Work (flexible and independent working), values such as trust and empowerment, and charity events that help people lead more self-determined lives. As mentioned in section 3.1.2. (cf. supra pp. 40-41), many companies contribute positively to their environment, but employees might not always be aware. By showing them what the company is already doing well and encouraging employees to actively participate in actions of societal value, internal communicators can elevate the perceived authenticity of the purpose.

In short

- 1) Internal communicators should explain the meaning of the purpose and make sure employees understand the link between the purpose and the business (no commitment without understanding).
- 2) Internal communicators should make sure that new employees are familiarized with the purpose. This can be done as early as during the onboarding sessions through collaboration with HR.
- 3) Internal communicators should design communication practices that are designed to make employees think about their individual purpose and how this purpose relates to the company purpose. Participative communication approaches and CSR programs should be leveraged for this step.
- 4) If the internal communicator is involved in the discovery of the purpose, they should represent the employees' point of view and involve employees as much as possible.
- 5) The internal communication strategy should consider the company's purpose structure. In the case of a purpose-supported differentiation, the communicative initiatives that accompany the launch of the purpose must attract employees' attention.
- 6) Differences in the business lines and differences in the way the purpose is to be interpreted for internal and external clients should be considered when the communication strategy is developed.
- 7) Internal communicators must find a way to measure the effectiveness of their purpose communication strategy but should avoid that measuring becomes an end in itself.
- 8) Internal communicators should find positive examples of employees that are already purpose-driven to tell their stories and encourage them to become ambassadors.
- 9) Internal communicators should think about the aspects of the corporate culture that fit the purpose and promote those.

6.2. The limits of the use of internal communication to engage employees in corporate purpose

Even though internal communication initiatives can have an impact on employees' engagement and specifically their engagement in corporate purpose, there are understandably also limits to the use of internal communication to engage employees. As mentioned in the theoretical part of the thesis, people's personality has an influence on their propensity to engage. And even though it was concluded that everyone can theoretically be engaged, independently of their personality, it is utopian to think that an internal communication manager could find the right communication mix to engage every single employee. The larger the organization, the more personalities there are, and the more difficult it is to find a method that suits everyone. To illustrate the point, we could look at one of Swiss Life's Purpose Workshops where one employee expressed the opinion that *the purpose of a company is to make money and nothing else*²³. Even after explanations were given as to why the company needs a purpose besides the creation of shareholder value, this employee remained firm in their conviction and unfortunately influenced their team members to adopt the same view. The discussions within this team turned out to be considerably less fruitful than within other teams. The example at hand shows that people who are not ready to be convinced probably won't be and might even counteract the efforts of the communicator. While this should not discourage the communicator, it is okay to accept (and should be accepted) that not everyone can be engaged. Some will find the company's purpose motivating and will draw strength from it, and others won't. After all, a person's job is not the only source for them to find a purpose. Some might prefer finding self-fulfillment in their hobby or their family life. As the engagement theory revealed, attempts to engage employees can also backfire (cf. supra pp. 18-20 *Risks of engagement*). Therefore, they should never be pushed to the extreme. A purpose should never put additional pressure on employees or exhaust them. Moreover, gaps between "what is said" and "what is done" should be avoided at all costs. Internal communication should thus never "talk things up".

Another, quite obvious, limit to the use of internal communication to create engagement is that communication (even if the right communication mix could be found for every employee) is never enough to create a culture of engagement on its own. As the study of engagement antecedents revealed, engagement arises out of a combination of several components. Good communication can thus only show its effect if other antecedents such as a supportive leadership style, a positive work climate, solid career opportunities, job security, ... are given. The previous section concluded that internal communicators have to promote the company's culture. In that way, they can support the formation of an "engaging" culture (i.e. by making employees aware of positive corporate initiatives and existing career opportunities). Nevertheless, many factors are out of the internal communicator's control. If an employee for instance feels like they are lacking career opportunities, this problem might not easily be solved through communication only.

A third limitation for the communication of the corporate purpose can be the purpose itself. As repeatedly mentioned, a purpose must be significant, authentic, profitable, and seriously implemented (Bruce & Jeromin, 2020). If those conditions are not fulfilled, it is unlikely that the internal communicator (or anyone else) can truly engage employees in the purpose. In the ideal case, the internal communicator would be involved in the discovery of the purpose from the

²³ These are not the exact words of the employee, but the message that was conveyed.

beginning. That way, they could make sure that the internal client is considered just as much as the external client when the purpose is formulated. The involvement of HR professionals is understandably equally relevant in this step. Unfortunately, this scenario does not materialize in all companies. Especially in the case of the purpose-supported differentiation, it is, first and foremost, the external client that is considered and to whom the purpose is directed. Additionally, in the case of large, multi-national companies like Allianz and Swiss Life, the purpose is decided upon in the head office. The local communicators then have to find an interpretation of the purpose that works with their internal (and external) clients. While the formulation of further statements, like Swiss Life's "Actively shaping your career", is supposed to facilitate internal communication by explaining how the purpose is to be understood for the employee, this can also create further complexity. As the interviews have shown, when employees think about the purpose, they think about *self-determination*. "Actively shaping your career" is not on their mind. The question that arises is thus whether it would not be better, from a communicative perspective, to have only one statement. In the case of Allianz, there are even three statements: one for internal, one for external and one for HR communication. This makes things unnecessarily complicated and confusing for employees who oftentimes struggle to remember even one sentence. Even if the idea is the same in all statements, simplicity should be preferred.

A fourth limitation for the use of internal communication to engage employees in corporate purpose is that much of the responsibility of communicating the purpose lies with the upper management. And while management communication can arguably be part of internal communication (cf. *hierarchical communication* (Men, 2021) p.26), it makes sense to look at management communication individually for now. The Kienbaum study (cf. section 3.2.1. p. 42), as well as the study conducted at SLGS, showed that when it comes to purpose, employees value most what management communicates. This goes for upper management, but also middle management (line managers). To illustrate this point, we could again look at SLGS's Purpose Workshops. During this event, one of the line managers stated: "We are not purpose-driven, we are numbers-driven". This statement tells us that the Swiss Life management has not credibly communicated that the company wishes to become purpose-driven. This could be the case because (1) the company, indeed, does not wish to become purpose-driven (but in which case one can, in any way, not expect the full commitment of employees) or (2) there is a problem with the communication. To some extent, a company must always be numbers-driven in order to survive. However, this should not stand in the way of making decisions based on the purpose. If this is not the message that the upper management conveys, it is unlikely that the company will come to a point where it can reap all the benefits usually linked corporate purpose. The upper management sets the tone, and middle managers pass the message on to their teams (both consciously and unconsciously). For the internal communication department, the commitment of upper management is equally important. Much can theoretically be done in internal communication to involve and engage employees. However, most of it boils down to budget and managers' willingness to have their teams spend time on the purpose issue.

In line with the previous point, something that became quite clear in the interviews at SLGS is that line managers must "live" the purpose. Consequently, they do not only have to *tell* the employees that the purpose is a company priority, but they must also *act* accordingly. The interviews revealed that for Swiss Life employees, the purpose is mostly understood in terms of working flexibly and taking responsibility. These insights guide leaders in how to manage their teams so that employees feel the purpose in their everyday work life. Understandably, flexible working and the possibility to take responsibilities are also influenced by corporate and HR

policies. It is thus, again, the right interplay of components that matters. The internal communicator usually has no direct influence on those components. Nevertheless, as mentioned before, management/hierarchical communication could be considered part of internal communication in which case it would support the hypothesis that internal communication has a huge impact on employees' engagement in a corporate purpose. Additionally, it should not be forgotten that the internal communicator also has a strategic role in providing advice to senior management (Yeomans & FitzPatrick, 2017). Consequently, if the internal communicator feels like more effort is required from the (senior) management, they should mention this concern. Unfortunately, as mentioned by C. Georis, it is "not always easy to ask management to spend more time on this topic".

Finally, it should be mentioned that employees' engagement in corporate purpose is not only influenced by the management's commitment and internal communication, but also by what is done in human resources. Almandoz, Lee and Ribera (2018) suggest that the extent to which a purpose is experienced as meaningful is influenced by the organizational culture and that this culture must be fostered through people management. The three relevant dimensions of people management are (1) recruitment and fit (recruiting people who prioritize prosocial objectives), (2) socializing and training (trainings and socialization practices to encourage prosocial behavior) and (3) reward systems (rewarding those who exemplify the desired attitudes). For HR Officer A. Cure, the purpose is part of the recruitment process at SLGS: "We look for proactive people who are able to take their career in their own hands. People who need a lot of help don't feel good here. Therefore, we don't recruit them. So, indirectly we are choosing people that fit the purpose" (A. Cure, personal communication, 7 April 2022). As for the reward systems, SLGS currently does not have any purpose-specific policy in place, but the purpose plays a role in employee retention. At Swiss Life, the purpose is, among other things, understood in terms of *employability* in HR. A. Cure explains that we live in a world where there is "obsolescence on skills". People need to keep up with a certain level to stay employable, therefore, updating skills is key. Besides, people also want to develop and acquire new tasks. Repetitive tasks do not attract or retain employees (A. Cure, personal communication, 7 April 2022). Hence, the way the purpose is reflected in HR policies and practices matters a great deal for employee engagement.

In short

- 1) It is impossible to find the right communication mix to engage every single employee, and you probably would not want that either. Every person needs a sense of purpose and self-fulfillment, but this need does not necessarily have to be fulfilled at work.
- 2) Engagement arises out of a combination of engagement antecedents. If those are not given, communication initiatives cannot show their full effect.
- 3) The internal communicator is not always involved in the discovery of the purpose and has to work with what they get.
- 4) Much of the responsibility to communicate the purpose lies with upper and middle management.
- 5) Human resources also play an essential role in the engagement of employees in corporate purpose.

7. Final Conclusion

Although some critics still doubt the construct of corporate purpose, the fact that more and more companies are jumping on the bandwagon shows that the number of those who see its potential predominates. I am convinced that the launch of a corporate purpose can come with many advantages for an organization. Nevertheless, companies should not take the task lightly and carefully think about whom to involve in the process and how. To a company's customers, but also its employees, there is a fine line between a meaningful purpose and purpose-washing. Companies must thus be careful not to fall into the "purpose trap". I think that with corporate purpose, it is impossible to do things half-heartedly. Purpose requires an idealistic approach, even if the ideology might seem naïve at times. Making efforts to engage employees in the company's higher purpose is thus inevitable. The goal of the thesis was to assess the role of the internal communication professional in the engagement of employees in corporate purpose. In hindsight, it can be said that the role of the internal communicator is indeed not to be underestimated and that the internal purpose communication deserves a considered strategy. Nevertheless, there are also limits to this role as the commitment in the endeavor cannot only come from internal communication but must be shared with upper and middle management, external communication, and human resources.

The management must show strong commitment towards the purpose, not only through the targets they set but also in the way they behave. Strong management communication is crucial in times of change. Employees expect their managers to be role models and "live" the purpose. Besides internal and management communication, external communication is also relevant in employee engagement, as many take notice of the things their company is communicating on the outside. At Swiss Life Global Solutions, some employees even pay more attention to the company's LinkedIn communication than the intranet. Consequently, internal- and external communication must be coherent and coordinated. In many companies, good collaboration between internal and external communication is given because they belong to the same department. Nevertheless, there can also be other models, as in the case of SLGS, where internal communication is closely linked to HR. Regarding the importance of HR policies and practices in "bringing a purpose to life", this association is by no means a disadvantage. One should just ensure that the connection to external communication is not lost along the way. External, internal, and HR communication should be harmonized so that employees get a coherent message when it comes to corporate purpose.

Coming back to the hypotheses, the first hypothesis "Internal communication can support the internalization of corporate purpose when the purpose is introduced retrospectively" can be confirmed because internal communication can:

- (1) Support the discovery of the company's "authentic purpose" by involving employees,
- (2) Make the purpose well-known and understood within the company by repeating the purpose often and explaining its different aspects,
- (3) Unleash the power of "energizers" (purpose-driven employees that inspire others) by telling their stories (Quinn & Thakor, 2018),
- (4) Connect the people to the purpose (Quinn & Thakor, 2018) by bringing employees and their managers together and make them think about how the purpose connects to employees' daily tasks,
- (5) Encourage managers to address the purpose with their teams,

- (6) Promote a culture that fits the purpose and encourage people to take advantage of existing initiatives,
- (7) Listen to employees and collect their feedback.

The second hypothesis “The way corporate purpose is communicated influences people’s engagement in the topic” can also mostly be confirmed. The Swiss Life case study showed that, while some communication approaches are not that effective to engage employees (one-way communication that does not require action from the employees), other approaches (participative communication) can get people excited and committed to the purpose. When employees are given the feeling that their opinion is valued, they are much more likely to see the purpose as a source of motivation and to carry it to the outside world. Swiss Life identified a social issue; namely that longevity is largely underestimated in almost all areas of life and that the increasing of people’s lifespan requires better financial planning. This is the problem that should be discussed internally to show employees how the company purpose is contributing positively to our society. If employees only see the purpose in terms of contributing to the self-determination of someone who is already relatively well-off (namely a wealthy customer), this might not fulfill employees’ “need for universality” (cf. p.7), meaning the need to contribute to the common good ((Bruce & Jeromin, 2020). If the purpose is communicated from the angle of its “overall contribution to our society”, it is much more engaging than when it is predominately communicated from the customer’s angle. The way a purpose is communicated, and the way people are involved in the discussion through internal communication tools, thus indeed influences engagement.

Nevertheless, the study also suggests that it does not only matter “how” something is communicated but also “by whom”. Hierarchical communication has the most significant impact on people. If the purpose is not sufficiently addressed by upper and middle management, the efforts of internal- and external communication, and HR professionals might be in vain. The purpose should be implemented at the team level, meaning by the direct supervisor, otherwise company-wide initiatives are usually short-lived. Additionally, it should not be forgotten that even though communication has an impact on employees, other factors influence them too. A purpose can both be inherently engaging and well-communicated, but employees might still not be ready to go the extra mile for the company. Whether it is a structural or a relational problem, many things can prevent employees from feeling committed to the organization. Moreover, as previously mentioned, some people are not even interested in finding purpose at work because they can fulfill their need for purpose elsewhere. If that is so, the way the purpose is communicated might not make a big difference to them.

So, to summarize the best practices of internal purpose communication, the key is to build good collaboration between management, HR, and external- and internal communication. Furthermore, I believe that each company needs a designated person or team that takes matters into its hands and can afford to spend a decent amount of time on the internalization of the purpose. A company’s internal communication manager seems to be a suitable person for the job. But of course, building a team with representatives of the key departments (as Allianz has done) is equally good, if not better. Independently of the organization, the chosen person or team should have enough authority as well as the willingness to come up with initiatives of their own accord. In my opinion, it is not enough to only work on the purpose topic when it is required by the parent company. Additionally, delegating it from afar also seems rather complicated. Employees need to see the commitment of those that work with them directly. Furthermore, when communicating, it should be shown that the purpose is pursued for its own sake and not for the company’s

monetary goals. If not, the engagement attempts might leave a bitter taste among the employees (cf. supra pp. 18-20 *Risks of engagement*). Whatever communication strategy is chosen, internal communicators should try to get people excited for the purpose so that they do not perceive it as additional work.

Limitations and Research Perspectives

The case study that was conducted for this thesis is not without limitations and leaves many open questions and ideas for further research. Concerning the limitations, the most important one is that the sample size at Swiss Life Global Solutions is rather small. Even though the thesis manages to consider the views of the larger public through the Purpose Workshops and the Employee Engagement and Purpose Perception surveys, the more detailed insights were only gathered by interviewing twelve different employees. As those employees were volunteers and were not chosen to represent the overall workforce as best as possible, the study results could be biased one way or another. Understandably, interviewing a larger number of people would have restricted the risk of bias and may have led to more nuanced insights. If more employees had participated in the study, it might also have been possible to consider the differences between different age groups. It is often assumed that young people are more likely to look for a purpose and therefore engage in it more easily. It would be interesting to empirically verify this assumption and find out whether a company's age distribution impacts its purpose internalization.

Another limitation of the study was created by time and resource constraints. I was only at Swiss Life Global Solutions for fifteen weeks and only saw a small portion of the internal purpose communication. To be able to develop a more detailed guide on how to handle a company's purpose communication and reveal universal best practices, it would be necessary to follow several companies over a longer period of time. I did not witness the launch of the purpose at Swiss Life and as many people only have a vague memory of how things were handled and explained at the time, I cannot pretend to have the full picture of the company's purpose communication. I thus only analyzed things to the best of my knowledge. The third and last limitation I would like to mention is that I, myself, am rather pro-purpose. Of course, I tried not to let this affect me during the writing of the thesis, but I cannot guarantee that I always managed to do so. Additionally, it is not only my own views that influenced the outcome of the thesis, but also those of the authors I cited. I feel like the authors who spend a lot of time researching the concept of purpose do so because they are, to a certain extent, already convinced by it. This could lead them (and me) to see things less critically.

What I furthermore want to clarify at this point is that finding purpose at work is not the same as being happy at work. Whether it is a colleague one does not get along with, a boss who is too demanding, or company politics that impose tedious processes. Many things can stand in the way of finding happiness at work, regardless of how important and fulfilling one's mission is. Additionally, as touched upon before, finding purpose at work can also come with risks associated to over-engagement. If employees find meaning in the work they do, they usually invest themselves more deeply in their job. Unfortunately, the more invested people are, the more likely they are to suffer from a bad work-life balance and burnout. Further research could thus focus on how the risks of over-engagement should be handled in internal purpose communication.

Moreover, the influence of internal communication on employee engagement seems rather understudied. Many companies still see internal communication mostly in terms of spreading

information within the company and not so much in terms of increasing employee contribution and making employees feel valued. By paying more attention to the link between communication and engagement, the view on internal communication might change over time. If I were to explore the topic any further, I would focus on how engagement can be influenced through good cooperation between internal communication professionals and team leaders. The Swiss Life case study revealed that hierarchical communication is key when it comes to corporate purpose. The question that arises is whether the internal communicator can help managers become better communicators. As also confirmed by the SLGS Employee Engagement Survey, communication is a theme that often comes up when employees are asked what does not work well within the organization. Yet, this insight does not usually lead companies to reconsider communicative responsibilities within the company. Especially when it comes to interdepartmental communication, nobody really feels responsible as team leaders manage things related to their teams and internal communication professionals often do not feel authorized to tell team leaders how to interact with each other. Therefore, I would be interested in further studying the dynamic between internal communication departments and team leaders.

Epilogue

Dear Reader,

If you made it to this page, I know you already have quite a few pages behind you and are probably waiting for the end. Nonetheless, I invite you not to skip this page because I simply cannot come to end without sharing what led me to write this thesis in the first place and explaining how doing so has influenced me personally. My story starts in the second half of the first year of my Master's program or more precisely the moment when my fellow students and I were encouraged to think about potential topics for our Master's thesis. I knew that I had to choose something I was passionate about as I would have to spend many hours on the topic. Unfortunately, when thinking about the subjects that could interest me in relation to my studies, I came up with a whole lot of ...nothing. Somewhere along the way, I had developed an incredibly cynical view of the way companies operate and our economic system in general. I started thinking about what I wanted to do with my life and quickly realized it had nothing to do with helping companies find ever new ways to push products at people or ways to cut costs to the benefit of a few and the disadvantage of many. I was gripped by the unpleasant feeling of having taken a wrong turn. Suddenly, I could not, for the life of me, imagine why I had ever believed Business studies to be the right path for me. Do not get me wrong, I have enjoyed my studies and am incredibly grateful for what I learned. But I just felt like it had nothing to do with who I was and what I wished to do.

Of course, quitting was not an option. I had already put so much time and effort into my studies and was dedicated to making *it* work for me, whatever "it" would turn out to be. I went looking for an internship based on what I thought I might enjoy and be good at. This is how I came to internal communication. Being creative, creating content, and organizing events. That I knew I could and wanted to do. However, when I started my internship at Swiss Life Global Solutions, I realized that internal communication could give me more than just tasks I enjoy doing. It allowed me to help people feel connected to the organization they work for and find meaning in what they do. If I was struggling to see how the career I was about to start could match my convictions, others would be too. That, I did not doubt. And so, I had found the subject of my thesis. I had to write about corporate purpose and how internal communication could help employees find meaning in their work. I then embarked on a journey that not only let me submerge in the concept of corporate purpose but also made me reflect on my own life goals. At times, the search for my own purpose distracted me from writing my thesis, but I think that this was supposed to be part of the process. At some point during my Erasmus in Munich, probably while listening to Prof. Dr. Georg Zollner talk about sustainability and ethics, I realized that I had not chosen the wrong studies. I was unhappy with how things were, but that just gave me an opportunity to change things for the better. Since then, I have made it my mission to motivate the leaders of tomorrow to do things differently. And while still writing this thesis, I went job hunting and found a job that allows me to do just that.

So, to conclude, I do not know whether the concept of corporate purpose will be enough to make us do business more fairly and sustainably, but at the very least, I am convinced that it can help people find meaning in what they do. Studying the purpose of companies and my own helped me find out what I want from life and brought me closer to the studies I chose. If thinking about my purpose can help me, I am sure it can help others too.

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