

CHAPTER 34

Aligning Daily Actions with Long-Term Purpose: A Manager's Guide to Sustainable Success

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ABSTRACT

Managers work in a very dynamic environment, one that is highly competitive and has a high pressure towards short-term results. The indicators around which organisational success is measured are largely based on short-term productivity and efficiency measures. There's more to it than that, but such measures can take focus from an organisation's purpose and their long-term prospects. When managers focus too much on the short-term challenges, there is a risk that they lose the sense of direction with respect to the organisation's broader strategy, and the short-term effects can be managerial fatigue, loss of morale, loss of commitment and eventual drift away from strategic direction. This article explores the rationale for linking current tasks to the organisation's bigger aim. It is built upon the leadership literature and suggests that managers who have a purpose are more motivated, better at making decisions, better at dealing with uncertainty and more successful in the long-term. It then reflects on how the shift from high-level strategic goals to action can be achieved and states four needs - clarity of purpose, intentional prioritisation of work, reflective and ongoing self-assessment, and leading by example. Each of these (organizational culture, communication patterns, and ethical leadership) is crucial to keeping things on track with a purpose as it exists only in an environment where people's culture, norms and behaviour support it. The article concludes that it is not one-time alignment that is necessary but ongoing alignment.

Keywords: Purpose-driven management; Goal alignment; Organisational culture; Sustainable success; Leadership.

1.0 Introduction

Business managers are dealing with many consequential decisions every day, from

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managing their operations to solving problems, allocating resources, keeping track of performance, and relating with colleagues and stakeholders. Many of these need immediate attention and need to be implemented under challenging circumstances: time constraints, uncertainty as a result of competition and technological change, and demands from the top level of management.

Therefore, managers often focus on short-term goals and not on broader goals. Their daily workload is so full up that they fail to achieve permanent measurable results: They become tired and exhausted, and they become ineffective and alienate themselves from strategic objectives. Under short term pressure, an organisation's capability, employee morale, and ethical leadership can all be neglected, affecting the sustainability of the organisation's operations.

An organisation has a purpose: its vision for the future and the values it is based on which help it to act. Purpose is not about making a profit, it is used to guide decision making and govern leadership actions and behaviour and culture (Sinek, 2019). A clear purpose provides managers with direction and meaning; it helps them decide on the effectiveness of each decision and whether it will move the organisation up the longer-term goals. The daily action drives long-term purpose, and managers are more focused and energized, better able to motivate employees and grow trust, and able to adjust to change without losing sight of strategic direction. If it does not, work is split, leadership is erratic, morale wanes and the identity of the organisation is fragile.

This article reflects consideration of the ways in which managers can relate routine activity to organisational purpose. It examines what purpose-driven leadership looks like, what are the barriers to becoming purpose-driven, how to embed purpose in the day-to-day decision-making process and what are the potential benefits that can result from maintaining purpose over time.

2.0 Conceptual Framework: Purpose-Driven Management

Purpose-driven management is based on the idea that leaders don't just tell people what to do or chase numbers. They guide teams towards goals with meaning, and purpose is the link between people's motivations and the organisation's goals. Managers who grasp and commit to the purpose of their organization gain higher levels of trust, engagement and commitment from their people (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). This demands an ability to convert general aims into specific and meaningful action on the part of the managers as well as a habit of asking and re-asking questions about the decisions being made to see if they benefit the organisation as a whole. Value-based decision making is typical of the approach: balancing longer term consequence with shorter term convenience. Purpose provides a set of values and provides a frame of reference for the future.

The framework acknowledges that alignment is a continuous process. Managers need to reflect continually if their day-to-day activities still align with the organisation's longer-term goals, and be ready to adjust as needed, as an organisation evolves.

3.0 Establishing Clarity of Purpose

The first step in the role of a manager is to ensure they have an explicit understanding of where the organisation is going. The first step is to define its mission, vision and values, defining what the organisation is and what it wants to accomplish. Managers need to know how they value and what their professional goals are. When a manager's own personal sense of purpose is congruent with the organisation's, authenticity and commitment follow and trust with colleagues is more easily built. Setting this clarity is helped by strategic planning, leadership development and structured self-reflection. Questions like this help to define purpose and inform everyday decisions: What impact will the organisation have? What will a specific role contribute to the mission?

4.0 Translating Purpose into Daily Action

4.1 Distinguishing urgency from importance

How to tell the difference between Urgent and Important. Managers are not able to do everything at once and competing demands mean that there's a need to differentiate between what's urgent and what's important. Urgent tasks are tasks with no value in the long run and that demand immediate action. This depends on planning and taking decisions on longer-term goals rather than pressure, which requires discipline and a willingness to refuse offers that don't align with the direction of the organisation.

4.2 Delegation

Delegation is an important aspect in this regard. With permission to do something that the manager does, the employee can learn, gain new skills, and become more involved in the organisation and can help the manager focus on tasks he/she can only do.

4.3 Decision-making with purpose

All decisions made by a manager have an impact on the organisation, big or small. Managers make decisions based on the purpose and consider the implications of that decision over the longer term, rather than choosing the option that is most convenient. They think about the impact it will have on those in the organisation, the impact it will have on the culture of the organisation and whether or not it will make a difference that will be sustainable in the long term.

Cutting costs for immediate gains, say, can hurt a product or service's morale and quality for the future. A purpose-driven approach looks for a defensible balance of short-term gain versus long-term cost. Inconsistency in decision-making leads to confusion in a workforce. When managers make decisions regularly, expectations and priorities are clear and promote coordination and teamwork.

5.0 Reflection and Self-Awareness

Reflection is what allows managers to remain aligned with their longer-term objectives. Without examining their own conduct, managers may drift into patterns inconsistent with what they intend to achieve. Setting aside time for reflection develops both self-awareness and confidence. Weekly review, a working journal or structured feedback sessions all serve this purpose. Useful questions include whether a particular course of action advanced the organisation's long-term objectives, and what might have been done differently. Questions of this kind allow managers to learn from error and to accept responsibility for their conduct. Reflection also reveals patterns of behaviour that would otherwise pass unnoticed, identifying where improvement is possible. Self-awareness is a fundamental component of emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1995), and managers who develop it act more authentically and address difficulties with a realistic understanding of their own strengths and limitations.

6.0 Modelling Purpose-Driven Behaviour

Managers shape organisational culture through the example they set. Employees observe how managers allocate their time, how they decide and how they respond to difficulty. Where managers demonstrate consistency between daily activity and long-term purpose, they signal that purpose-driven work genuinely matters. Managers who model such behaviour discuss objectives, values and the reasoning behind their decisions openly. Where the reasons for a decision are explained, employees understand how their own contribution supports the organisation's wider goals, and both trust and shared commitment develop in consequence. Where managers demonstrate integrity and consistency, they reinforce the organisation's commitment to ethical conduct, which strengthens its reputation and supports its sustainability.

7.0 Collaboration and Engagement Across Teams

Employees contribute to shared objectives most effectively where they participate in discussion about how individual roles support the wider purpose of a team. Collaborative

goal-setting helps employees understand how their own objectives relate to organisational priorities. Reviewing progress during regular meetings, performance discussions or recognition programmes keeps everyone engaged with questions of purpose and progress. Engaged teams prove more adaptable and more resilient, which improves an organisation's capacity to respond to uncertainty (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2017). Engagement grounded in shared purpose also supports collaboration across teams and reduces resistance to change.

8.0 Organisational Culture and Systems

To get alignment, the systems and culture of an organisation need to be aligned. All policies, performance measures, reward systems must reinforce long-term goals and not compromise them for short-term results. Performance appraisals that focus on conduct as well as results promote a balanced approach to decision making and values-based leadership development puts purpose into the work. Culture sets out the expectations and norms of the workplace and these shape the interpretation of the stated purpose of an organisation by the managers and employees. Leadership should then review periodically to see if there is integrity between what the organisation says it is about, why it is about, and what it actually does, on a day-to-day basis. If commitment and behaviour do not align, there is cause for distrust and engagement is more difficult to achieve.

9.0 Challenges and Barriers to Alignment

There are many barriers that hinder the linkage of everyday activity and ultimate purpose. Due to time and energy limits, as well as outside pressures, managerial attention is diverted from strategic considerations. Ambiguous goals and mismatched priorities create confusion of direction. These must be tackled intentionally, with the creation of systems that facilitate day-to-day delivery, effective time management, the clarity of objectives that are still vague and the creation of arrangements that facilitate future thinking. A reflective culture can offer opportunities for leaders and employees to reflect as a team on the significance of their work in relation to the organisation's broader goals.

10.0 Implications for Sustainable Success

When what you do on a day-to-day basis is aligned with what you want it to benefit you overall, it creates more coherence, resilience, and adaptability. Managers with purpose have clarity when it comes to complexity and will gain people's buy-in and better outcomes. True sustainable success is more than just monetary return. It covers ethical behaviour, social responsibility and value creation for the long term, and managers who integrate purpose into their business make a contribution to these broader goals.

11.0 Conclusion

The rate of change is accelerating and managers struggle continually with short-term objectives and long-term goals. Making decisions now that align with the purpose of an organisation is a compelling way to help overcome that challenge. Without this alignment, the decisions become ineffective, employees become disengaged and organisational performance decreases over time.

Clarifying purpose, prioritising deliberately, reflecting regularly and modelling purpose-driven conduct makes it possible for managers to achieve coherence between their purpose and how they spend their time. Alignment thus becomes a planned activity and not a reactive one focused on task completion, resulting in enhanced outcomes, better quality decision making within the organisation and a more positive and healthy culture.

Making daily action align with long-term purpose is therefore not a once-off strategy to be undertaken. It is manifested in the commitment to purposefully managing the organisation and the society it serves, for the benefit of individual members.

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