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Master of Science in Management Engineering

MASTER THESIS

EMBEDDING PURPOSE IN ORGANIZATIONS: A GROUNDED SINGLE CASE STUDY

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Abstract

A company's performance can be improved by creating a common and consistent corporate purpose that influences both its internal and external image. While external stakeholders raise their interest in the company as they acknowledge its social function, employees are more driven to work and more engaged when they sense that shared ideals are truly lived within the organization. In this regard, organizational purpose is seen as one of the main levers in overcoming "shareholder primacy" in the contemporary socio-economic environment, where there is a growing focus on social issues above economic profit. The process of ingraining these principles, however, should not be underestimated by organizational leaders that aspires to embrace a purpose-focused change. Although the idea of corporate purpose is studied in the literature from a strictly theoretical and abstract perspective, an empirical study looking at how purpose might be implemented in an organisation is still lacking. In this regard, this study aims to examine the transformational process that took place within NOS, the business school of Paideia, describing the mechanisms beyond it. By engaging in qualitative data analysis, the research has the objective to generate an inductive, grounded model of the embedding purpose process within an organization. The model shows how this process is not linear but is rather punctuated by a series of tensions and enablers. The results reveal in concrete terms the mechanisms underlying the practical use of a purpose embedding process developed by a business school, which broadens the understanding of purpose.

Keywords: qualitative research, purpose embedding process, business school

Abstract in italiano

La performance di un'azienda può essere migliorata creando uno purpose aziendale comune e coerente che influenzi l'immagine interna ed esterna. Mentre gli stakeholder esterni aumentano il loro interesse per l'azienda riconoscendone la funzione sociale, i dipendenti sono più motivati a lavorare e più impegnati quando percepiscono che gli ideali condivisi sono realmente vissuti all'interno dell'organizzazione. A questo proposito, il purpose organizzativo è visto come una delle leve principali per superare la "supremazia degli azionisti" nell'ambiente socio-economico contemporaneo, in cui c'è una crescente attenzione per le questioni sociali al di sopra del profitto economico. Il processo di radicamento di questi principi, tuttavia, non dovrebbe essere sottovalutato dai leader delle organizzazioni che aspirano ad abbracciare un cambiamento incentrato sul purpose. Sebbene l'idea di purpose aziendale sia studiata in letteratura da una prospettiva strettamente teorica e astratta, manca ancora uno studio empirico che esamini come il purpose possa essere implementato in un'organizzazione. A questo proposito, il presente studio si propone di esaminare il processo di trasformazione avvenuto all'interno di NOS, la business school di Paideia, descrivendone i meccanismi. Impegnandosi nell'analisi qualitativa dei dati, la ricerca ha l'obiettivo di generare un modello induttivo e fondato del processo di implementazione del purpose all'interno di un'organizzazione. Il modello mostra come questo processo non sia lineare, ma piuttosto scandito da una serie di tensioni e fattori abilitanti. I risultati rivelano in termini concreti i meccanismi alla base dell'uso pratico di un processo di incorporazione del purpose sviluppato da una business school, che amplia la nostra comprensione del concetto di purpose.

Parole chiave: ricerca qualitativa, processo di implementazione del purpose, business school

Executive summary

Research on the concept of organizational purpose is still very far from being thoroughly theorized. The emphasis on the definition of why a company exists (i.e. the definition of corporate purpose) has recently arisen and is gaining momentum among management scholars. However, because this area of study is still relatively new, there aren't any studies that specifically address how to integrate an organizational purpose in an already-existing business.

An early-stage company is more likely to have a very "heartfelt" purpose, even if it is implicit or uncodified, because founders of new companies infuse purpose, values, and passion into the company they form. However, a different argument needs to be made for long-standing, established organizations. In order to be aligned with stakeholder needs, incumbents must now go through a process of strategic transformation aimed at embedding purpose at all organizational levels. To this goal, it is intriguing to comprehend how this process works and how to make sure that the employees and any other stakeholder parties with an interest in the organization can completely absorb the values on which the purpose is built. This study, which is conducted on the Paideia' NOS business school, is inspired by the necessity to investigate these processes. As a result, this research examines the process of embedding purpose, which started within NOS two years ago and is currently ongoing. A theoretical model is derived from this study to serve as a guide for the investigation of similar processes in the same or different realities. In this regard, the goal is to qualitatively investigate this phenomenon by interviewing NOS organizational members at different levels of the hierarchical structure. Analysing the interviews, it is therefore possible to define the macro-themes on which the model is built.

The research on the NOS embedding process purpose is a section of a management science that must investigate how organizations practically institutionalize their purposes. Considering this, it can be deducted that organizational purpose is a complicated and nuanced notion that can

only be understood through its execution, as opposed to the linear and simple concept that it is perceived to be in the literature. Although the model derived from this research depicts a process with a starting point and some outcomes, few more elements enrich the drafting of the model itself. In particular, the mechanisms through which purpose is embodied in the organization are highlighted, as well as the tensions – such as structural, environmental and tensions related to process nature - that are created and the enablers – such as the presence of factors capable of facilitating cultural change readiness and the evidence of internal cognition regarding the need to shift gears - that allow and facilitate the embedding purpose process.

However, though it is not generalizable to every context, the contribution made by this research represents a foundation on which to study similar processes in other business schools or other companies. In this sense, the study conducted can be considered as a first step toward a more concrete theorization of the concept of organizational purpose. It is therefore crucial for future research to identify a reference framework that can be generalized and applicable in different sectors

Contents

Introduction

Among management and business scholars, the concept of organizational purpose is currently gaining traction. Stakeholders demand that companies have a purpose or social impact that goes beyond the mere realization of profit (Rocha, Pirson & Suddaby, 2021). Indeed, the principle of shareholder value maximization reigned undisputed until August 2019, when the Business Roundtable (BRT) - a group of leading CEOs of companies, including JPMorgan Chase, Amazon, Apple, and Walmart - issued a statement in which they placed at the centre of a company's business the primary interest of serving all of its stakeholders (Harrison, Phillips & Freeman, 2020). This might be seen as the historical turning point when organizational purpose started to gain momentum. Indeed, the importance of purpose for contemporary organizations cannot be overstated, and these organisations are increasingly putting it at the centre of their strategies.

In a socio-economic context in which stakeholders increasingly care about the social impact of organisations, a firm that encapsulates a purpose is one that deeply embraces the concepts and values on which its purpose is built, both internally and externally. These beliefs and principles could be pro-social, concerned with sustainability, or geared toward improving the state of human life. Although theorized in a straightforward, even utopian manner in the literature, the execution of this theory of purpose within a corporation is likewise not simple. Companies are trying to pursue this purposeful path, but both internal and external dynamics need to be considered. Businesses must codify purpose internally through organizational processes, attitudes, and practices to the fullest extent possible (George et al., 2021). The leaders of the organization, particularly middle managers, play a critical role in achieving this goal. They actually need to communicate that guidance to the lowest operational level side, boosting their productivity, motivation, and dedication (Gartenberg, Prat & Serafeim, 2019). On the other hand, the difference between purpose and legitimacy is the primary difficulty with regard to externalization of organizational purpose (Durand & Huynh 2021). A company's compliance with stakeholders' priorities serves as evidence of its legitimacy (Durant & Gouvard, 2021). When a company's purpose is in accordance with the interests of its stakeholders, stakeholder engagement occurs; nevertheless, when the goal is incongruent or opposed, a resistance force or opposition arises.

Furthermore, understanding how and where the purpose of an organization originates continues to be the major topic of dispute among management scholars today. Imprinting theory contends that internal forces of purpose in a for-profit firm are based on the motivating ideals and devotion of an organization's leaders, who are generally its founders. Even after the company's founders have stepped down as CEO, their objectives and beliefs may still have an effect on it (George et al., 2021). But there are other issues with the idea of imprinting, such if and how the purpose changes when the founders are gone, or alternatively, what internal and external factors guarantee that the purpose stays the same throughout time (George et al., 2021). Thus, a number of theories have been developed around the idea of corporate purpose; yet, a thorough examination of a corporate process of strategic change focused on purpose is missing from the literature. Moreover, scientific study on purpose is still in its early stages, and the limited practitioner literature there is on the subject is not generalisable. Therefore, an in depth single case study of the Paideia business school – NOS -, that attempted an embedding purpose process, is carried out for contributing to research in this field. The study's goal is to qualitatively analyse a purpose embedding process that concretely occurred and is still ongoing. From the data gathered, it is possible to theorize a model that might be used as a reference in the study of related processes through the reworking and coding technique of the interviews done with NOS personnel. Particularly, the model produces a number of interrelated components. It has a starting point, "Past evolution and starting context," which, like other processes, describes the original situation in which the NOS finds itself at the outset of transformation, as well as the "Mechanisms of embedding purpose" and "Process outcomes." Then, two additional components "Process enablers" and "Tensions created in the process" are added to these pieces, which act as an outline. Process enablers are all the elements that make the strategic change possible. Conversely, the tensions complicate and hinder the implementation of the purpose. In conclusion, the study on the Paideia business school adds significantly to the body of work on purpose since it institutionalizes the processes and organizational implications that an embedding purpose process might have rather than limiting itself to a theoretical definition. In this sense, this study departs from the theoretical and traditional conception of purpose, but delves into its institutionalisation, dealing with a dynamic process still taking place within a real organisation.

Literature Review

2.1 Purpose

2.1.1 Defining Purpose: from the individual to the organizational level

This section explores the idea of purpose by first examining it from the perspective of a single human being, and then in the context of the workplace. Finally, to have an accurate synthesis of the literature, the concepts of meaningfulness of work, job crafting and calling are analysed.

2.1.1.1 Meaningfulness in human action

According to the Concise Oxford English Dictionary, the word purpose means "(*1) the reason for which something is done or for which something exists; (2) determination or resolve*." Purpose, indeed, represents the why, the deep meaning that inextricably drives human actions and behaviours. According to Viktor E. Frankl (1946) purpose is a human force, which does not correspond to what we do or what we strive for, but to the meaning behind it. Quoting his words*, "man's search for meaning is the main motivation in his life."* As a result, even though individuals may not always be aware of it, purpose is constantly there. In fact, one of the most common human mistakes is to believe that after an event, there is immediately a reaction in the form of actions and behaviour, but this is not true. Indeed, people forget some invisible elements that happen so quickly that they are not able to catch them. It is the event that evokes thoughts and feelings that people experience in the body and that puts them in a certain emotional state or state of mind from which the purpose emerges. This is then, the proactive engine that drives individuals' efforts and behaviours. Therefore, it appears to be clear that purpose is hidden behind every decision, although people may not be aware of it. According to this perspective, purpose is consciously or not characterizing the individual human being in each of his action.

Thus, this applies individually as well as to the work environment and the organizational context. In this area, it has been argued that having a feeling of purpose is a crucial function in the construction of meaning and meaningfulness of work, as it relates current events to expected future events and states (e.g., happiness, love, redemption) (Baumeister & Vohs, 2002). In this regard, it is crucial to shed light on the concepts of meaningfulness of work, job crafting, and calling in order to better analyse the concept of individual purpose in an organizational setting.

2.1.1.2 Work meaningfulness

Organizational academics are drawn to the issue of the meaning of work because it goes beyond materialistic perceptions of work behaviour to deeper explorations of purpose and significance (Heine, Proulx, & Vohs, 2006; Pratt & Ashforth, 2003) as well as eudemonic aspects of wellbeing (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Ryff, 1989). This subject has been explored in literature from an extensive range of perspectives, but in general, they all directly or implicitly address two essential issues: the sources of meaning and the methods through which work acquires meaning (i.e., the underlying psychological and social systems) (Rosso, Dekas & Wrzesniewski, 2010). The self, other people, the job situation, and spiritual life are considered as the four primary sources of meaning or meaningfulness in literature. Authenticity, self-efficacy, self-esteem, purpose, belongingness, transcendence, and cultural and interpersonal sensemaking, are instead the terms researchers cite for work being seen as meaningful or developing significance (Rosso, Dekas & Wrzesniewski, 2010). It is important to mention and underline purpose among these. The relevance of an individual's view of the significance of their job, in terms of serving or having a sense of purpose via their work efforts, is highlighted by research in this field as a factor in the experience of meaningful employment (Rosso, Dekas & Wrzesniewski, 2010).

Although understanding meaning is an intuitively straightforward idea, some academics have suggested that defining "meaning" is a difficult exercise (e.g., Brief & Nord, 1990a; MOW

International Research Team, 1987; Super & S Verko, 1995). Complex factors must then be considered while defining meaning and determining its origin. Meaning can be created on an individual level from one's own views, on a communal level from shared perceptions or standards, or on both levels (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003). The majority of the research on the meaning of work in the field of organizational behaviour has taken a psychological approach, assuming that people's subjective interpretations of their work experiences and relationships are the source of their sense of meaning (Baumeister, 1991; Brief & Nord, 1990a; Wrzesniewski, 2003). This psychological viewpoint gives people the primary agency to determine the meaning of work for themselves despite being surrounded by numerous potential sources of meaning in their work (Brief & Nord, 1990a; Nord, Brief, Atieh, & Doherty, 1990; Roberson, 1990; Ros, Schwartz, & Surkiss, 1999). Within this framework, scholars have used a variety of different definitions of "the meaning of work," ranging from general beliefs, values, and attitudes about work (Brief & Nord, 1990a; Nord, Brief, Atieh, & Doherty, 1990; Roberson, 1990; Ros, Schwartz, & Surkiss, 1999), to the personal experience and significance of work (MOW International Research Team, 1987; Wrzesniewski, Dutton, & Debebe, 2003). A sociological viewpoint on meaning, on the other hand, assumes that people assign meaning to objects or learn to perceive specific parts of their life as more or less significant in ways that reflect worldviews and value systems that are impacted by society or culture (Geertz, 1973; Kluckhohn, 1951; Kluckhohn & Strodtbeck, 1961; Mead, 1934). According to academics from this tradition, people's work is more likely to be considered important when the social and cultural structures in their environment agree on its importance. However, the great majority of studies on the meaning of work in the field of organizational behaviour places more emphasis on personal experiences, thoughts, and emotions than on the societal or cultural factors influencing how meaning is interpreted.

Finally, further clarifications are needed on the difference between the concept of meaning and meaningfulness. Indeed, the terms "meaning" and "meaningfulness" have frequently been employed interchangeably by researchers, which has made it unclear whether and how these constructs vary and how they connect to one another. According to Pratt and Ashforth (2003), when academics discuss the "meaning of work," they often imply either the kind of meaning people assign to their job (referred to as "meaning") or the degree of significance they place on it (referred to as "meaningfulness").

2.1.1.3 Job crafting

Employees redefine and reimagine their job designs in ways that are personally meaningful through a process called "job crafting" (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Task crafting, relational crafting, and cognitive crafting are three categories of job crafting approaches that job crafters can use to actively change the boundaries of their job. Task crafting concerns the possibility for employees to change the list of tasks listed in a formal job description by adding or removing tasks, changing the type of tasks, or varying the amount of time, energy, and attention devoted to specific tasks. Changing how, when, or with whom employees collaborate in performing their jobs is called relationship crafting. Finally, cognitive crafting means that workers change the way they view the connections and tasks that make up their jobs (Berg, Dutton & Wrzesniewski, 2013). The act of crafting a job is not a singular occurrence. Instead, job crafting is a constant process that is presumably impacted by individuals' career paths (Fried, Grant, Levi, Hadani, & Slowik, 2007), as well as the social environment in which they work (Berg, Wrzesniewski, & Dutton, 2010). Employees initiate and carry out changes to their employment from the bottom up, as opposed to managers, as is the case with many job redesign interventions, who lead changes from the top down. Employees may then design their jobs in ways that provide more meaningfulness by utilizing the distinctive knowledge they possess about their professions and themselves. (Berg, Dutton & Wrzesniewski, 2013). Moreover, job crafting is a particularly important process for cultivating engagement and job satisfaction in a workforce that is increasingly dissatisfied with its work (Conference Board, 2010) and retiring later and later (Johnson, Butrica, & Mommaerts, 2010).

2.1.1.4 Calling

The most contentious topic in the literature is probably the definition of calling. Although a calling has been described as an orientation (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1986), mind-set (Dik & Duffy, in press-a,b), or perspective (Dik & Duffy, in press-a,b), the majority of scholars frame calling as a psychological construct that may be incorporated into larger career theories or interventions as opposed to a new theory of career development or career counselling comparable to well-studied vocational construct. However, there is no universal agreement on the meaning of the word, and the many contemporary approaches can be categorized using a basic contrast between "neoclassical" and "modern" definitions (Duffy & Dik, 2013). Bunderson and Thompson (2009) remark that neoclassical methods mirror how the word has been interpreted historically and stress a feeling of destiny and prosocial obligation, reiterating an earlier finding by Baumeister (1991). Modern methods, in contrast, frequently place a greater emphasis on an underlying need for personal satisfaction or self-fulfilment. Given the fact that research participants also differ in their understanding of the word, it is possible to argue that this discussion over whose definition is the "correct" one is more of a linguistic than a scientific one (e.g., Hirschi, 2011). Dik and Duffy (2009) examine the many definitions from the humanities and social sciences and have found three elements that, when combined, are symbolic of a calling in the workplace. The first is the idea of an external summons—that if a person feels "called" to a certain line of employment, this entails a "calling," who may be a higher power, societal needs, a familial heritage, national needs, or any other force external to the person. This element is in line with both the definition of "calling" in its original sense and the way the word has historically been employed in reference to employment. The second factor is that a person's attitude to work should be consistent with their overall sense of purpose in life; for such people, work either provides a feeling of purpose or acts as a space in their lives where that purpose may be expressed. The third factor is that a person's work is socially oriented; that is, those who are called to a profession utilize it to either directly or indirectly benefit others or further the common good (Duffy & Dik, 2013).

2.1.2 Organizational purpose: main themes

In this section, the concept of purpose is expanded and analysed in an organizational context. The main definitions of purpose in the literature are selected, grouped according to different topics, and examined. Then, organizational purpose is scrutinized considering its internal and external dimensions. The internal dimension of organizational purpose looks at it from the internal perspective of a company and focuses on commitment and leadership. According to the external dimension, on the other hand, organizational purpose is a corporate objective. In this last subsection, finally, the relationship between organizational purpose and external stakeholders is analysed, introducing the concept of hybrid organizational forms that combine not only multiple but also opposing logics and identities, such as social enterprises that combine a pro-social and a commercial logic

2.1.2.1 Defining organizational purpose

Since purpose is specific to the individual human being, organizations cannot directly choose a purpose. This does not mean that organizations do not have a purpose, it simply means that they cannot define or change it at will. So, going from the individual level to the organizational one, the concept of purpose comes to be the answer to the question "Why does a company exist?"

Adopting simplistic reasoning, the immediate answer is obvious: a company is a legal construct through which different people can achieve something that they could not achieve alone. To a greater extent, an organization can be seen as a machine that need people to properly function. Indeed, the very heart of a company are social relationships, and people that make the "machine" work. The success or failure of company is strictly dependent on the actions and decisions undertaken by those who manage and work for the organization. In this regard, when trying to make sense of the concept of purpose at the organizational level, the emphasis of the answer to the question "Why does a company exist?" should be put on people that together coalesce in human entity with their beliefs and values. As a matter of fact, according to the knowledge-based view of the firm, companies exist "*because they may create circumstances in which numerous persons can combine their specialized knowledge*" (Grant, 1996: 112). Forgetting this and considering a company as an entity detached from the human sphere, inevitably leads to a lack of understanding of the concept of organizational purpose. It is clear, therefore, that companies do not just make products or services, they produce people (Hollensbe et al., 2014). Therefore, it should come as no surprise that Barney & Wright (1998), using the Valuable, Rare, Imitability and Organization (VRIO) framework, suggest that human capital resources can act as the foundation for a firm's competitive advantage, if firms focus their training activities on firm-specific skills, create team-based competencies rather than individual-based competencies, and focus on human resource systems rather than individual practices (Agarwal, 2019). Furthermore, the way an organization defines its purpose and, more importantly, the extent to which the latter is able to engage and inspire, has a powerful impact also on the perceptions of its stakeholders (Hollensbe et al., 2014; Gouvard and Durand, 2022).

Several individual and organizational purpose definitions can be found in the literature, which are summarized in Table 1, highlighting three main topics: *Pro-Social*, *Philosophical*, and *Corporate Objective*.

Although it is also taken up in other definitions, the *Pro-social* theme is particularly emphasized in the definition proposed in *"The economics of higher purpose"* (Thakor & Quinn, 2013), according to which purpose is something that is inextricably linked to the production of social good, to the maximization of social welfare.

Two *Philosophical* definitions also stand out, both of which can be found in the article *"Leadership as purpose: Exploring the role of purpose in leadership practice"* (Kempster, Jackson & Conroy, 2011). Although they date back to the time of Aristotle, both are incredibly modern and current as they are tied to the idea that purpose is something that is innate to every human being and is nothing more than an external finality that aims to benefit others and society. Even though these definitions also have a completely social and ethical meaning, they have been considered as a philosophical theme, since they analyse the concept of purpose from a spiritual point of view and examine the meaning of human existence and being.

Finally, the last topic *Corporate Objective* includes all those ontological definitions related to the organizational and corporate world. The lowest common denominator in these definitions is concreteness. In almost all definitions, there is a tendency to strongly emphasize the pragmatic nature of the concept of purpose. According to these definitions purpose in the organizational context is not a general corporate goal or as a pseudo-marketing campaign to convince and ingratiate internal and external stakeholders, but is something authentic and lived within a company. Purpose wants to have a moral and social impact that goes far beyond the classic idea of shareholder primacy and shareholders' value maximization.

In this regard, two ideas have dominated over the last 40 years. One is that the purpose of business is to maximize profit (Friedman M., 1970). The other is that people only care about themselves and are motivated by money, status, and power (Rocha, Pirson & Suddaby, 2021). It goes without saying that without profit and monetary rewards for employees a company would collapse, but the problem is not that, but rather the perspective given. The traditional perspective is to give absolute priority to shareholders. But, according to the organizational purpose school of thoughts, this is not feasible anymore. A broader perspective should be taken. A perspective in which profit is simply the effect of pursuing the organizational purpose. Then, pursuing organizational purpose will also enrich employees' activities and tasks with a deeper meaning. They will not be incentivized only by money, status and power, but also by higher aspirations. The necessity of a purposeful perspective is something that has become even more evident with the outbreak of the Covid 19 pandemic that undermined the foundations and assumptions of corporate market capitalism according to which profit is the only fundamental purpose of business. Of course, some people only seek a return in business, but this is a choice, not the only one (Rocha, Pirson & Suddaby, 2021). *"Money matters, but for most people three other things are more fundamental - the quality of relationships, the desire for meaning and fulfilment through work, and the opportunity for autonomy, development, and mastery"* (Rocha, Pirson & Suddaby, 2021 p. 8).

Purpose			
Definitions	**Source**	**Article**	**Theme**
"Something that is perceived as producing a social benefit over and above the tangible pecuniary payoff that is shared by the principal and the agent."	Thakor AV, Quinn RE (2013) The economics of higher purpose. ECGIFinance Working Paper 395, Olin Business School, Washington University, St. Louis	Corporate purpose and financial performance (Gartenberg et al 2019) OS	**Pro-Social**
[...] By Aristotle within his ideas regarding teleology – purpose being something that is inherent in all beings. Associated with the notion of extrinsic finality which consists of a 'being' realizing a purpose outside that 'being', for the utility and welfare of other beings	Leadership as purpose_Exploring the role of purpose in leadership practice (Kempster et al 2011) pag. 322	Leadership as purpose_Exploring the role of purpose in leadership practice (Kempster et al 2011)	**Philosophical**
"A concrete goal or objective for the firm that reaches beyond profit maximization."	Henderson R, Van den Steen E (2015) Why do firms have "purpose"? The firm's role as a carrier of identity and reputation. Amer. Econom. Rev. 105(5):326–330	Corporate purpose and financial performance (Gartenberg et al 2019) OS	**Corporate Objective**

Table 1. Three definitions of purpose (one per theme) are given here from the literature. Please refer to the appendix for the complete table of purpose definitions

2.1.2.2 The internal dimension

Commitment and meaningfulness

Defining a coherent and shared purpose, concretely embedded in everyday activities of a company allows to manage and overcome critical tensions between shareholders and stakeholders, business and state, competition and regulation, and financial performance and social welfare. For these reasons, on August 19, 2019, the Business Roundtable (BRT) - a group of leading CEOs of companies, including JPMorgan Chase, Amazon, Apple, and Walmart - issued a statement in which they placed at the centre of a company's business the primary interest of serving all of its stakeholders. In doing so, BRT emphasizes not only the importance of using appropriate KPIs to measure performance that goes beyond economic return, but also that a company's purpose should be the means by which that aim is achieved and suggests that purpose should be as concrete and truthful as itself (Harrison, Phillips & Freeman, 2020). Firms must, indeed, move beyond narratives to formalizing purpose concretely in organizational routines, behaviours, and practices (George et al., 2021). In this regard, analysis shows that the higher in the organizational hierarchy is the role occupied by the individual, the stronger is the perceived purpose of the organization. Therefore, middle managers' role becomes crucial in driving the relation between high purpose and financial performance in everyday tasks and routines. Mid-level employees with strong beliefs in the purpose of their organization and with high clarity in the path toward that purpose experience better performance and are able to transfer that direction to the low operational level side, increasing their motivation, commitment and productivity.

Leadership & purpose

In order for external stakeholders, such as customers and society, to recognize truth and consistency in the actions and development of a company, its own promoted image should be based on a strong and integral culture, of which purpose, as defined, is an essential ingredient. To do this, it is necessary that employees and all internal stakeholders find themselves aligned with and pervaded by the same culture that should distinguish their image. However, the lack of trust found in companies (at the external level) and leaders (by employees) strongly undermines the achievement of such a configuration and its benefits. A recent area of investigation shows that employees are influenced by their work environments which are often learning background where good behaviours can be practiced, and character be formed. Therefore, the way corporate leaders describe the purpose of the company, and the commitment and dedication they inspire in their people, can have a great effect on these people's broader sense of responsibility to others and to the community (Hollensbe et al., 2014).

A current line of analysis conducted on non-governmental organizations (NGOs) confirms the benefit of a clear definition of an effective corporate purpose. NGOs indeed result to be the most trusted institutions, with stakeholders who recognize their coherence and truthfulness, and who are ready to preserve and improve their activity. NGOs are perceived common-good organizations, because they are created without the primary objective of creating profit for their investors but founded on a clear and shared idea of their purpose. (George, et al., 2014).

2.1.2.3 The external dimension

The corporate objective

In the current corporate reality, dominated by the universal principle of maximising shareholder value, profit is still the only concern of firms. The roots of this culture do not go back that far. Among the others, Milton Friedman himself, Nobel Prize-winning economist and strong proponent of free market capitalism, holds that corporations maximise their social welfare by maximising their profits, because a corporation's profit is nothing more than a measure of social welfare: The essence of "profit" is that customers value something more than it costs them to provide it. And, since stock price is the best measure of sustainable future profitability, firms maximise social welfare by maximising stock price (Davis, 2021).

Against this background, this doctrine has become the mainstay of all business school courses and the basis of most MBA programmes. The practical consequences have then affected different industries. Practical examples are start-ups and their financing. A start-up offers a valuable product or service, and it is driven by a pure and ambitious purpose. To grow, the company seeks external funding. With the guidance of investors, the company implements an ambitious growth plan that requires it to go beyond its original idea and find more profitable uses for its assets. Thus, in order to obtain funding, the start-up becomes strongly dependent on its investors, to the point where it disfigures itself by losing the purity of its initial purpose (Davis, 2021). Therefore, there is a clear trade-off between technical demands (creativity, survival, productivity, profitability) and institutional demands (authenticity, remaining consistent with one's purpose and values).

Depicting a solution to this tension between purpose and profit goes through the distinction between existing companies, that are transforming into dual-purpose settings, and newly formed dual-purpose companies. Dual-purpose companies are those that combine the pursuit of profit with the pursuit of social goals. While born dual-purpose companies are born with a structure that best supports their dual identity. Born-dual purpose are better positioned in a network of stakeholders that have clearer expectations of their purpose. In contrast, transition companies are embedded in a network of stakeholders that are still linked to their initial single-purpose: pursuit of profit (Battilana et al., 2020). Therefore, they may have to make difficult trade-offs to create public and private value, including foregoing opportunities for value appropriation that could undermine their purpose (George G, 2021). How can this intensity of trade-offs be reduced? In the article *"Beyond Shareholder Value Maximisation: Accounting for Financial/Social Trade-offs in Dual Purpose Companies"* (Battilana et al., 2020), there are several factors that determine the intensity of such trade-offs. To properly examine those factors, we need to consider that Battilana et al. (2020) simply consider purpose as a company objective such as profit maximizing, without putting too much emphasis on the meaningfulness and prosocial aim of purpose per se.

These factors are: first, the degree of economic liberalism of the sector in which the company operates. The higher the degree of economic liberalism, the higher the intensity of financial/social trade-offs. But holding the degree of economic liberalism constant:

- The more specific and explicit the financial and social goals of a dual-purpose company are, the lower the intensity of the financial/social trade-offs,

- The longer the time horizon of financial and social goals of a dual-purpose company, the lower the intensity of the financial/social trade-offs,
- The more top executives of a dual-purpose company are socialized in both financial and social logics, the lower the intensity of the financial/social trade-offs,
- The more the attention of the board is focused on the achievement of both financial and social goals, the lower the intensity of the financial/social trade-offs,
- The more organizational members of a dual-purpose company are incentivized to attain both financial and social goals with moderate powered incentives, the lower the intensity of the financial/social trade-offs

In addition to these pragmatic measures to overcome the financial/social goal conflict, to truly move away from the shareholders' value supremacy, there is a need to reform corporations and corporate systems, as governments alone are unable to regulate corporate purposes or, on a larger scale, control corporate behaviour (Davis, 2021). And this time of crisis seems an ideal time to initiate such change. After all, with the onset of the Covid 19 pandemic, workers have strongly questioned their own values, asking themselves, "Why do I go to work?", "What is the reason I wake up every day? " It is clear, therefore, that workers are now more aware than ever of social and sustainability issues, but more importantly, they are demanding consistency from their companies. (Davis, 2021). For example, workers in technology giants and elsewhere are demanding that their employers live up to the values they proclaim in their mission statements (Davis, 2021). The current situation, then, seems fertile ground for such reform. Indeed, there is evidence that companies with an entrenched corporate purpose have weathered the pandemic better and have even emerged stronger.

However, the word reform itself is usually associated with the idea of radical change, but it does not have to be. In fact, purpose is about *"to produce profitable solutions to the problems* *of people and planet"* (Davis, 2021: 5). A corporate purpose builds trust and greater engagement with customers, employees, and suppliers, and can therefore be very profitable. Corporate reform is thus a system design problem that requires reformers to address several interrelated issues - corporate law and directors' duties, regulation, the importance of ownership, measurement, and accountability - all aimed at aligning corporations with their defined purpose (Davis, 2021). To achieve this goal, the key word is democracy. Corporations should be more democratically accountable to their members and relinquish democratic control to those who do the actual work. Of course, this does not mean drastically eliminating hierarchy, but having employee representation at the highest level or employee-elected administrators at the top and ICT for day-to-day democracy at the lowest levels (Davis, 2021). Although these discourses need to be subjectivized for the individual company, depending on the context in which it finds itself, the industry in which it operates, and the relationships it maintains, this dictate of democratisation seems to have a practical application.

Hybridity

Hybrids are, by definition, the offspring of two distinct species (OED 2010), and in the organization and management literature, the term has been used to describe organizations that cross institutional boundaries (Brandsen and Karré 2011; Jay 2013; Pache and Santos 2012; Smith 2010) and work across multiple functional domains. (Ruef 2000). Doherty, Haugh, and Lion (2014) describe hybrid organizational forms as structures and practices that allow the coexistence of values and artifacts from two or more categories, drawing on earlier conceptualizations of hybridity. For a very long time, academics have maintained that organizations must constantly adjust to various institutional and external pressures (Besharov and Smith 2014). Indeed, Meyer and Rowan (1977) underline how internal organizational structures that are frequently conflicting are a manifestation of institutional environment multiplicity. While some academics (Battilana & Dorado, 2010; Zilber, 2002) link diverse logics in organizations to contestation and conflict, others (McPherson & Sauder, 2013) characterize coexistence or logic blending (Binder, 2007). Additionally, some scholars claim that having numerous logics endangers performance and eventually causes companies to fail (Tracey, Phillips, & Jarvis, 2011), while others assert that having different logics promotes organizational longevity, sustainability, and innovation (Jay, 2012; Kraatz & Block,2008). According to Doherty, Haugh, and Lion (2014), Social Enterprises are an excellent illustration of a hybrid organizational forms (Pache and Santos 2012) because they cross the boundaries of the private, public, and non-profit sectors, bridging institutional fields (Tracey et al. 2011) and contend with competing institutional logics. According to their review of social enterprises, hybridity generates both opportunities and challenges, which in turn affect mission and resource mobilization, particularly in relation to tensions, trade-offs, and developing new operational processes for managing conflicting demands. The demands of various stakeholder groups, as well as competing and conflicting commercial and social logics, must be managed by SEs (Battilana and Dorado 2010; Battilana et al. 2012). According to Zahra et al. (2009), this causes tensions resulting from conflicts over the relative importance of financial over social aims. These tensions may then cause purpose drift and perhaps problematic stakeholder legitimacy (Nicholls 2010c). SEs employ trade-offs, such as purposefully forgoing profit, to preserve the balance between value creation and capture, in order to alleviate the tensions (Santos 2012). Moreover, the acquisition and mobilization of financial resources is impacted by SE hybridity. Although SEs cross institutional boundaries and demonstrate increased flexibility (Pontikes 2012; Chertok et al. 2008; Dart 2004), mainstream banks and venture capital firms are thought to find the emphasis on social value creation less appealing because it may result in lower profits than those from other clients (VanSandt et al. 2009). In addition, hybridity makes it challenging for bankers to classify SEs, and traditional sources of funding have a limited understanding of them (Battilana and Dorado 2010; Brandsen and Karré 2011). As a result, there are conflicts related to the preference for commercial goals over social ones. Finally, hybridity offers a significant way to increase knowledge about SE human resource management. Due to limited financial resources, SEs reportedly pay workers less than the market wage (Zahra et al. 2009), which restricts access to competent workers. However, according to Battista and Dorado (2010), Haugh (2007), Membretti (2007), and others, SE's social goal serves as a non-financial motivation. Numerous SEs also rely on the work of volunteers and trustees who freely give their time and talents. Even though volunteers could provide valuable talents, Liu and Ko (2012) state that there could be conflicts between workers and volunteers, especially if SE's humanitarian objective has shifted toward a more commercial orientation. This may force employers to choose between paying high wages to talented workers and spending money on finding and training volunteers, which would diminish the resources available to generate social value and make the SE less appealing to social investors (Doherty, Haugh & Lyon, 2014)

Purpose and legitimacy

The main issue regarding organizational purpose is the distinction between purpose and legitimacy. Having clarified that the image of a company's purpose is nothing more than a function of the viewpoint of its audience, i.e., stakeholders, it is crucial to make clear the difference between legitimacy and purpose. On the one hand, a company's legitimacy is its adherence to what is considered important to stakeholders, "*the apparent conformity of companies to the existing state of affairs*". On the other hand, the key to understanding purpose must be: purpose represents what a company strongly believes in, the issues it cares about, and the resulting "*attempts by companies to substantially change the existing state of affairs*" (Durand & Gouvard, 2021). It follows that legitimacy inevitably leads to consensus and positive feedback from stakeholders, who perceive the company as an ally in the social struggles in which they are engaged and are therefore actively involved in supporting the company through investment or the provision of resources. A company's purpose can have two completely opposite effects: If what the company sees as its raison d'être aligns with what stakeholders care about, then stakeholder engagement occurs, but if the purpose is incongruent or opposed, then a resistance force, an opposition, emerges. The paradox is that the opposition becomes a strong and tough one because there are ideals and issues at stake that create momentum and generate a strong proactive and militant movement from stakeholders and all the people who support the cause. Thus, one might conclude that it is better to have no purpose than to have one that has a negative effect on a particular audience (Durant & Gouvard, 2021).

Moreover, the media exposure to which companies are now open and the demand for ever greater transparency endanger the firm, and the opportunities for stakeholders to criticise the company's actions as not being in line with its stated purpose are increasing. Every decision, every step and every word become public knowledge and, depending on how it is interpreted, can be immediately judged positively or negatively. But the internal corporate process of formalising purpose is not as fast. While it takes as long to assess a company's work as it does to read a message on the phone, formulating a purpose for a company is not a simple mechanism. To achieve this, it is necessary to formalise purpose throughout the culture of the organisation, changing organisational structures, behaviours, and practises if the organisation is not already born with a strong purpose (George et al., 2021). Therefore, the risk of being criticised and viewed as a social washout or green washout is high and could have a serious impact on the company's image and identity. To conclude, while defining a company purpose can be a strong signal of differentiation in the marketplace, there is a risk that this could backfire and exclude completely the company from it.

Prosociality of purpose and stakeholders' relationships

Recent streams of research underline an interesting social point of view when discussing about purpose. The image and reputation of a company are the basis for greater productivity and purchasing power precisely because of its social image, both internal and external. In particular, companies operate in a "risk society" in which the social production of wealth is systematically linked with the social production of "risks". Global issues are often elusive, based on a mechanism of contagion, and systemic in nature and they open up a moral and political space that can give rise to a civil culture of responsibility and increase the engagement of social actors in their resolution (Patriotta, 2021). The definition and the stance of a company towards these global and social problems becomes therefore crucial for the achievement of the desired participation of all stakeholders involved in its productive and vital process.

The peculiarity of purpose, however, is that it is fundamentally a double-edged sword. In fact, a social and image request like the one previously underlined can lead and has led many realities to follow a sort of compliance mentality (Gunningham, Thornton, & Kagan, 2005: 302) that is focused on adherence to formal requirements rather than—and even at the expense of—the goals and values underpinning a firm's purpose. In addition, dynamics of growth, the imperative of satisfying venture capitalists and investors, and the pressures to find profitable uses for their assets inevitably drive corporations to behave corruptly, hiding their actions beyond a fake and not felt purpose. However, with modern increasing transparency, facilitated by the internet, mobile phones, and other digital technologies, companies are increasingly rewarded or punished when actions converge or diverge from their promises and espoused values. Beyond the increasing transparency of information, the institutionalization of reporting practices also enhances the monitoring and comparability of corporate actions and the impact they generate on the world at large (George, 2021). As the notion of purpose becomes formalized and standardized measures agreed upon (Barby et al., 2021), companies are likely to be held more and more accountable to their stated purpose. It is necessary, therefore, that the purpose should be not only well defined and shared but also consistent and coherent over time and actions. A company must be seen as truthful in the implementation of its values and its raison d'être in every choice and every activity, in order to benefit from its image and not be defeated by it. In fact, disappointed stakeholders reduce their commitment, engagement, and loyalty when they do not see a match between values and actions, when they perceive the purpose presented as only a social mask for the company, leading to a gap between policy and practice, the so-called concept of decoupling (Bromley and Powell, 2012).

It is interesting to note that in these terms the purpose is not only fundamental for the company, its image and its returns, but it becomes central also at the socio-regulatory level in addressing a void between market efficiency and regulatory effectiveness. It gives a corporation a direction while also acting as a self-regulatory mechanism. A focus on purpose redefines the corporation as a nexus of trustworthy relationships revolving around purpose (Patriota, 2021).

2.1.3 Purpose dynamics and implementation

In this section, some of the dynamics of organizational purpose are studied. In particular, the role of the founders and the dynamics of the organizational life cycle are firstly examined. Later, purpose impact on strategy, innovation and firm performance is investigated to understand the practical consequence of purpose embedding within an organizational context.

2.1.3.1 The role of founders and life-cycle dynamics

When analysing purpose in an organizational context, the open research questions are, "Where does purpose come from? Does it evolve over time or remain the same?' Although there is no clear answer to these questions, the concept of organizational purpose has undoubtedly gained tremendous traction among management scholars and practitioners (Durand & Huynh, 2021). In particular, the theory of imprinting holds that the inspirational beliefs and commitments of an organization's leaders, most often its founders, form the basis for the internal drivers of purpose in a for-profit company. Long after the founders have left their position at the helm of the company, their views and ideals can continue to influence the company (George et al., 2021). Specifically, the structures founders create to embed their beliefs are one method by which they continue to exert influence on companies. According to a recent study by Akroyd and Kober (2020), founders who foster strong employee commitment to the firm and a passionate alignment with the firm's vision are more likely to design and implement management control systems (such as hiring practices and cultural controls) that promote strong commitment to the firm while reducing the likelihood of bureaucratic structures that could harm the firm's culture. However, the theory of imprinting still raises questions, such as whether and how purpose evolves once founders pass away or, conversely, what internal and external factors guarantee that purpose remains constant over time (George et al., 2021).

Of course, we can argue that the purpose of a company evolves over time and adapt to the ever-changing external environment. The problem, however, is the extent to which the company's purpose is recognized inside and outside the company. In this regard, purpose is not a corporate goal that can be decided and changed at will, as it involves moral content and deeper values and commitments (Durand & Calori, 2006; Ricoeur, 1992). Indeed, corporate purpose is neither trivial, i.e., a simple description of what the company does, nor aspirational, but should be defined as "*producing profitable solutions to the problems of people and the planet*" (British Academy, 2018; Mayer, 2018).

2.1.3.2 Consequence on strategy, innovation and performance

While many CEOs or companies simply maximize their return on investment, they fail to recognize the real impact purpose can have on the business and on a firm's strategy. Indeed, one of the main issues companies may experience is the misalignment between the stated purpose and its strategy. Such gap may be reflected in the value creation process of the company that can, ultimately, generate three gaps:

1. The value-practices gap: this gap emerges when the stated purpose is not felt by employees, or it is not perceived as authentic by them
2. The identity-image gap: this gap emerges when stakeholders do not perceive the corporate purpose as authentic, or they are not able to see the connection between what the company does and its stated purpose
3. The decision-making gap: this gap emerges when the company takes decisions or grows in a way that is unrelated or misaligned with the stated purpose.

All three of these represent gaps that a company should bridge to avoid the organizational purpose harming the company's external reputation and internally the performance of its employees, who, when they cannot perceive the essence of the purpose in daily activities, feel disengaged, demoralized, and with a sense of exclusion. However, to achieve this, a compromise must be found.

For what concern corporate performances, when analysing the impact of purpose on organizations, recent research shows that 89% of U.S. consumers think positively about, 86% trust, and 83% remain loyal to firms that put purpose first (Porter Novelli/Cone, 2019). Purpose-driven companies also appear to grow more quickly, outperform the market, and have faster rising stock prices. Companies that have a higher-level purpose at their core outperformed the S&P 500 by 400% over a 10-year period (Stengel, 2011). Moreover, younger generations are increasingly influenced by a company's purpose when deciding where to work, with more employees willing to sacrifice a percentage of their lifetime earnings for greater meaning at work (Porter Novelli/Cone, 2019).

Purpose alone is not associated with performance, but purpose when bundled with other beliefs is associated with performance.

[Claudine Gartenberg, 2019: 7]

In addition, last investigations report that only one in four members of the general public trust corporate leaders to correct problems, and only one in five trust them to tell the truth and make ethical and moral decisions. This breakdown in trust not only undermines lasting ties with employees, customers, suppliers, and society at large but also impedes the ability of businesses to engage in the risk-taking necessary to innovate and contribute to social and economic development (George et al., 2014). To the extent that purpose is the reason a company exists beyond mere economic return, purpose has been becoming essential to create a sense of consistency and consequent trust in the company. Implementing a consistent purpose promoted by a company's management, reinforcing, and sharing it internally among employees and externally as a corporate image and culture, are fundamental actions for company's life.

2.1.4 Measuring purpose

In this section, current purposefulness measuring methods are analysed. CRS and NLP methods are described in their application concerning purposefulness evaluation, with attention for external and internal purpose perception and alignment.

Measuring whether and how much a company is purposeful is a difficult action to tackle. Indeed, after the manifesto of principles has been established, a new problem arises when the purpose is simply seen as a manifestation of societal will: understanding how much it is concretely followed both internally; along the chain of processes, and leadership of the company, and externally, in the perception of stakeholders. From this point of view, measuring whether and how much a company is actually committed to the achievement, maintenance, and promotion of those values identified in its purpose is the core of a correct analysis of the phenomenon. Measuring the purpose, therefore, becomes a process or a tool for analysing how much alignment there is between the abstract manifesto of values defined by the company and concrete everyday actions. There is no analytical and universal measurement because management research has only recently begun to address this issue, and the task of measuring concepts clearly cannot be delegated to actors other than social scientists. Consequently, no paradigm has yet emerged that has established and legitimised measurement of the concept of organisational purpose. Moreover, before measuring a construct, it must be defined (Cronbach and Meech, 1955; Sartori, 1984; Suddaby, 2010). For this reason, in the last period, qualitative measurements of the commitment and alignment of a company along those values have been proposed.

Initially, the research operationalizes firms' purpose using various CSR (Companies Social Responsibilities) indicators and focuses on establishing the causal effects of specific purposeful policies on performance. However, CRS ratings are of limited reliability since they do not necessarily converge and showing that the adoption of a specific policy has an impact on performance may tell us more about the various effects of this particular policy than on the effect of the firm's purposefulness to specific audiences (Durand & Gouvard, 2021).

Latter studies of culture and firms underline the use of unsupervised NLP (Natural Language Processing) methods to assess constructs such as cultural fit, legitimacy, distinctiveness, and so to measure purposefulness. First of all, they are easily applicable to large samples of firms, and second, they produce results based on available data. NLP identifies clear and hidden patterns that might have otherwise been unseen. Among the existing NLP techniques, two appear to be the most suitable for measuring purposefulness: topic models and word embeddings. Often these types of tools are used to measure the fit between a company's purpose, the actions influenced by it, and its stakeholders' perspectives on what should be important to them. By extension, NLP is able to identify what stakeholders expect the company should fight or prioritize. Topic models allow to measure which topics are discussed within a corpus and are thus of special relevance to study the issues firms and their audiences prioritize. Topic models understand which are the main values and social problems they define as crucial to face. Word embeddings capture the meaning of words based on their contexts and hold great promise to measure latent understandings. In other words, they allow us to understand how deep and how strong the commitment to a topic is. The idea beyond topic models is based on the assumption of a probabilistic process present within a collection of documents: the highly probable words define what the topic is about. Topic models return for each document in a collection, a probability distribution over subjects representing how prevalent each of them is in a given document. Using topic modelling, it is thus straightforward to measure how prevalent each topic is throughout all the texts produced by a given firm and, linking topics to issues, observe how they prioritize some issues over others. This measure of priority is seen in this context as a detector of the main problems that concretely are placed at the centre of the actions of the companies. Therefore, this priority can be defined as company's concrete direction or its real purpose. A word embedding, instead, is a vector representing the meaning of a word in a semantic space. So, word embedding models refer to Natural Language Processing models which learn meaning vectors so that words with a similar meaning end up located in the same region of the semantic space (Mikolov, Chen, Corrado, & Dean, 2013; Pennington, Socher, & Manning, 2014). Thus, word embedding models offer the possibility to measure not only whether a firm and its stakeholders' understandings are similar but also whether they actually oppose each other along certain dimensions. Basing the measurement of purposefulness on NLP methods, it could be inferred that purposefulness is a product of both common issue prioritization and common understanding of issues.

NLP methods are functional to measure the adherence between what companies define as vital and basic for their purpose and the actions and level of priority they concretely demonstrate and what is requested by their stakeholders. NLP methods are therefore configured as excellent tools for measuring purposefulness from an external point of view, i.e. how is perceived what the company defines as a founding value and a social problem on which to focus by those who are externally interested (Durand & Gouvard 2021).

The internal aspect of the organization is a key feature for purposefulness spreading. In order to be effective, the purpose should be shared, rooted in the processes and environment that characterize the everyday life of employees. The more purposeful values are clear and shared by all the members, the more they will be ingrained in the organizational culture and identity. If this strong alignment is present, it generates a chain of identification and loyalty that is crucial to company survival. From this point of view, being able to measure how effectively the purpose is shared, present on the various levels of the company, and, above all, perceived by the individual employees who work there, is a step towards defining the purposefulness of a company. However, as the literature points out, even in this case there is no analytical and systematic way to quantitatively assess this quantity. In the article "*Corporate Purpose and Financial Performance*" (Gartenberg, Prat, and Serafeim, 2019) a quantitative method is proposed to measure a company's purposefulness based on a series of employee responses to selected questions. To assess the effectiveness and impact of a strong and shared purpose on economic performance, the researchers subjected employees of various companies to a series of questionnaires and interviews. Researchers measured the level of the purposefulness of the various environments aggregating and averaging the four statements which most closely emphasizes the importance of individuals' perceptions about the significance of their work and how it positively affects other people. *"My work has a special meaning: this is 'not just a job"*; *"When I look at what we accomplish, I feel a sense of pride"*; *"I feel good about the ways we contribute to the community"*; and *"I'm proud to tell others I work here"* (Gartenberg, 2019).

2.2 Business School

The aim of this paper is to explore the mechanism beyond a purpose embedding process in a business school such as NOS. To accomplish this, it is necessary to take a step back and analyse the business school sector, how it has been changing and why the decision of embracing a purpose-oriented change could be crucial for a business school nowadays.

2.2.1 History of business schools: from 1881 until today

A business school is a university educational institution where students study subjects related to business and commerce, such as economics, finance, and management. They confer degrees in business administration or management. Thus, they are in effect professional schools, such as law and medical schools (Agrawal, Khanna & Singhal, 2019).

Although there are some precursors, such as the "Ca' Foscari" business school founded in Venice in 1868, the first successful business school can be considered the Wharton School of Finance, founded in 1881 by Sir. Joseph Wharton, who donated $100,000 to the University of Pennsylvania to establish the school. Initially, the Wharton School of Finance was frowned upon by liberal arts faculty, who still adhered to a classical view of teaching rather than the practical one that Sir. Wharton's school implemented. It was not until 1898, seventeen years later, with the advent of the business schools at the University of Chicago and the University of Carolina, that the business school phenomenon took hold and was recognised worldwide as a high level of education (Wren, Van Fleet, 1982).

Today, it is widely recognised that such institutions should not only impart knowledge to students, but also help them apply that theoretical content to the business world, shaping the business professional of tomorrow.

2.2.2 Analysis of business school sector evolution

It is precisely the gap between theory and practise that represents one of the most important critical issues facing contemporary literature. On the one hand, it highlights one of the most obvious problems not only of business schools, but also of universities: the lack of practical feedback. Students and external stakeholders complain that lecturers rely too much on abstract, analytical models that neither prepare students for work in management (Datar, Garvin, & Cullen 2010; Rubin & Dierdorff, 2009), nor make a difference to their careers (Pfeffer & Fong, 2002). Although theoretical knowledge of models and tools, historical awareness of how business has changed over time, and interpretation of real-life case studies is critical to the cognitive development of anyone who wants to work in business administration or management, it is not enough. What is sorely lacking is the practical application of all that is taught. Although this problem is widely recognised, there is less agreement on how to achieve this goal (Agrawal, Khanna & Singhal, 2019).

On the other hand, another aspect to consider, which is inextricably linked to the issue of purpose, is the over-focus on a concept of leadership that is out of date. This is the result of a process of dehumanisation of leadership that is unconsciously practised by all business schools (Agrawal, Khanna & Singhal, 2019). Leaders coming out of these schools are extremely goal-oriented, their actions and values do not reflect moral ideologies (Ghoshal, 2005), they do not care about society (Khurana, 2007), and are characterised by a positive attitude toward greed (Giacalone, 2004; Wang, Malhotra, & Murnighan, 2011). This modus operandi has therefore led to a dehumanisation of leadership as a form of personal expression and social responsibility (Selznick, 1957) and denies the ambiguity (Alvesson & Spicer, 2010), emotional dilemmas (Bolden & Gosling, 2006), and relational dynamics (DeRue & Ashford, 2010b) that the experience of leadership entails. The result of these analysed dynamics is abstract curricula that justify selfish elitism and promote a narrow definition of values (Agrawal, Khanna & Singhal, 2019) that do not adequately prepare future leaders to deal with the dilemmas and challenges that leadership brings (Bolden&Gosling, 2006). From a perspective where the primary measure of success is nothing more than financial return, such numbers may also be recognised and appreciated by the general public, but in a purpose-driven context, such as the one presented in the previous chapter, where trust in leaders is at an all-time low, this leadership model cannot be successfully implemented.

Therefore, in order to bring about change, it is methodologically useful to understand how leadership is perceived today. In particular, DeRue (2011) identifies four persistent biases: conflating leadership with hierarchical oversight; focusing on leaders' influence over followers; treating leadership as a function of a person's traits, skills, or behaviour; and treating the environment as exogenous to the leadership process. In other words: the prevailing view of leadership in research is that a person rises to or holds a hierarchical position of power, competently adapts to his or her environment, and uses his or her influence to achieve financial (or otherwise measurable) results in order to move up the career ladder.

And therefore, what Marens says seems to be coherent with criticism of business schools in the literature: *"The times seem ripe for reopening the question of what exactly this institution* (business school) *is for, what functions we as a society want it to perform, and how well it is performing them"* (Marens, 2009: 6).

2.2.3 New role of business schools: a bridge for knowledge

This section examines the need for business schools to be repositioned. It is explored how business schools should be more conscious of their function as the hub of a community of stakeholders and as a facilitator of value co-creation.

One of the major concerns that, in recent years, have been directed at business schools is linked to their strictly academic nature. Business schools are realities that provide a learning service and have their foundation in the scholastic structure, so they appear to suffer from what could be defined as a "detachment from the practicality" of the service. A line of research highlights that often the risk of dwelling too much on theoretical learning results in a lack of preparation for the students in the world of work - for which they should be prepared at the end of the course. This "detachment from the practicality" afflicts not only business schools but in a similar way also realities such as universities. According to recert studies, a key to read this evidence could be that there is a wrong positioning by the realities related to the school world in the chain of value creation for the student. The unpreparedness to deal with real world problems found by many students is actually a direct consequence of the idea of the business school as the only provider of the "knowledge" value in its chain. In this way, business schools close themselves off too much behind teaching and school boundaries, perceived as the only reality capable of providing the knowledge that students need.

As a result of this last evidence, in recent years, many business schools are changing their value proposition by embracing what is defined as the service-dominant logic (SDL), placing the co-creation of value at the centre of their offering. The service-dominant logic (SDL) conceptualizes value as derived and determined in use, via the integration and application of resources in the use context, rather than in exchange embedded in a firm's output and captured by price. SDL regards value as the user's perception of the value-in-use from a multistakeholder perspective (Thomas, Ambrosini, 2021). In this perspective, value co-creation becomes fundamental and quite different from a simple co-production, whereby the supplier integrates resources and processes for the use of stakeholders. In fact, in the co-creation process, stakeholders can integrate their resources and processes to create value together with the supplier, focusing the process on the generation of potential value. What becomes central are the interactions, and in particular, those of high quality capable of providing unique experiences for the student developed between business schools, companies, and institutions, to the benefit of an increasingly competitive and complete proposal. Last studies have been stressing the importance of this sort of open innovation approach. An approach built not only on the need of the business school to provide concrete applications of knowledge and specialized skills, but especially on the environment and the network of heterogeneous and varied stakeholders in which these realities are immersed. According to last tendencies, business schools have to reconcile the interests of different stakeholders and the promotion of a collaborative and dynamic approach. This is the perfect way to extrude the potential of this heterogeneous network, touching the various interests and encouraging a greater sense of commitment from all parties. From this perspective, business schools should no longer act as the sole providers of value, but as aggregators of resources. A new role of business schools as bridges which facilitate the integration of network resources, stressing continuous mobility of resources and actors that characterize it.

The faculty, and in particular the professors, have an increasingly common tendency to change their focus of purpose away from an internal satisfaction - linked to the act of teaching itself - towards an external satisfaction - linked to the learning path of their students. This tendency further supports the new positioning of business schools in the creation of value. Indeed, it is interesting to cite a phenomenographic research of 2021 - "*Business school professors' teaching approaches and how they change*" (Mesny et al., 2021) -, which investigated the evolution of the process of satisfaction posed by teachers within their school career and more generally in recent years. According to this study, two evidence are pointed out. First, professors who are more focused on student satisfaction in the medium-long term, are more satisfied and self-fulfilled than ones with a focus closed on the act of teaching alone. Second, teachers perceive greater internal growth when they focus their teaching on student learning and not on student happiness. This research highlights that the maximum personal achievement of a professor is perceived and realized when she (or he) prefers a long-term focus on the student's learning of those knowledge and skills that are actually useful in the world of work for her (or his) personal and professional development. Therefore, the importance of teaching, and consequently of the school, is stressed in a network of resources that goes well beyond the mere exchange of knowledge and skills. A new purpose is recognized, with a positive impact on society, policy, and practice.

2.2.4 Importance of promoting a socio-ethical impact for business schools

In this section, the role of business schools as provider of social values is stressed out. Business schools' new role as core of a multi-stakeholder network appears naturally followed to the importance of promoting values and attention on today socio-ethical global issues. The adoption of a concrete and coherent purpose becomes therefore an effective mean for business schools to rich this positioning.

In the current debate regarding the importance of establishing a solid, coherent, and shared purpose for the competitive success of a company in the marketplace, business schools are also touched upon as a reality with the need to look beyond mere profit.

According to literature, business schools are institutions built on two logics. One logic is the two (three)-years duration of academic programs at the master's level. Enrolment is based on grades and other formal requirements, and grades are used as the main selection mechanism for the labour market. The second logic consists of shorter, non-degree programs of a few days or weeks. Enrolment is based on candidates' positions within their companies. The importance of the short order is mirrored by the need to sell such a program to the customers - the future students of the course. Since they are often detached from the academic institutional environment, the business schools are therefore configured as true companies with the need for an economic return linked to the fees paid as a result of the sale of the individual courses. Based on this finding, recent studies underline how, over time, also business schools have been suffering from the dilemma of shareholder profit. For years, the debate linked to the quality of education and teaching has been the only type of extrapolation from the focus on profit that the business school is intrinsically obliged to provide. However, according to the latest trends, if a business schools would position itself as the central pole of a multi-stakeholder network of realities and interests, it needs to define a larger purpose, inserted in what are the global issues. This definition and coherent promotion of business school purpose is able to give competitive advantage and visibility in the eyes of all the stakeholders belonging to the network (Thomas & Ambrosini 2021).

Another stream of research strengthens the idea that the promotion of education within business schools as a shortcut to higher earnings is a concept currently largely threatened by corporate social responsibility (CRS). According to Ethical Corporation[1], business schools that

[1] Ethical Corporation is an independent business intelligence, publishing and networking company founded in 2001. Its aim is to provide a constructively critical voice on corporate responsibility and sustainability and to facilitate debate between companies, and between companies and other stakeholders

emphasize an approach focused on CRS as a core element are likely to have a competitive advantage. Business schools should position their purpose beyond the economic profit burdens and put, as the central pillar, the creation of strong bonds given by a solid, consistent and truthful internal and external image. Evidence have been showing how scholars are increasingly stressing the importance not only of rethinking what is taught in business schools, but also of questioning those pillars on which they are defined, emphasizing the integration of ethical, responsible, and sustainable components in their training.

To the extent that business schools are a key part of a multi-stakeholder network, stakeholders increasingly expect to move beyond philanthropy and the integration of social responsibility into corporate strategy - thus creating a morality from individual to institutional. Business schools should therefore refocus their efforts to train ethical leaders in refining the kind of social vision, with emphasis on the civil and environmental responsibility issues that the modern world and its stakeholder's demand.

Methodology

3.1 Research Context

The NOS[2] was founded in 1979 as the business school linked to the Paideia. Initially distinguished as a promoter of courses specific to manufacturing, it then transformed over time into a comprehensive and international business school able to take advantage of the entire network that the Paideia brings.

In order to better connect with the Paideia ecosystem and the School of Management of which it is a part, the NOS changed its name to Paideia NOS Graduate School of Management in May 2022.

3.1.2 Company transformation (2020-2022)

Under the direction of Chairman - Domenico Giordano - and Dean - Elio Baresi -, NOS has been undertaking the change of the whole corporate structure since 2020. NOS leaders devised and implemented a plan of radical strategic change as a result of two main factors. The awareness of having grown considerably compared to the early years, especially in the international arena, and the need to position itself clearly, both from an internal cultural point of view and from an external image one. At the centre of this strategy was the premise of giving the company a purpose, which ran continuously through all the stages of the strategic transformation process. Within the range of decisions made by the company between 2020 and 2022, two major aspects were targeted as needing change. First, the strategy was revised, embedding new and ambitious growth goals in order to counter the disruption coming from the

[2] In this dissertation, companies and actors are given fictitious names

digitalization of education. Second, the fundamental values, beliefs, and practices that made up the organizational culture were overhauled to create a more flexible, open, and trust-based culture that could respond to future strategic challenges. Indeed, the leaders' growing realization that a change was required for the business school led to the creation of this transformation proposal. The latter's central tenet found its goal to be more than just maximizing shareholder value; it was primarily about developing and instilling new mindsets based on the idea of purpose.

Figure 1 represents the timeline of the salient events that are under study in this thesis. Thanks to the partnership with Vitana, a Regenerative Design Company, first B-corp certificated in Europe, NOS achieved B-corp certification in September 2020. It was the first business school in Europe, promoting values of sustainability and lower environmental impact both in its strategic and implementation plan and in all the programs lavished on students.

After that, NOS sought the assistance of the international marketing company Askelia, to carry out a re-branding process. The latter resulted in, among other things, the definition of a new logo and a new name that could highlight the connection with the excellence of Paideia University and the research and knowledge network associated with it. Thanks to that, Paideia NOS Graduate School of Management (Paideia NOS GSoM) was born.

In order to promote the new values throughout the whole organization, NOS launched a process of purpose embedding in February 2020 with the help of the consulting firm Brain & Effort. This process is the core of the research since it has enabled the new Paideia NOS GSoM, established in May 2021, to redefine the values, ambitions, and social role that the business school is now committed to maintaining over time.

"We are committed to inspire and partner with

innovators to shape a better future for all"

Purpose Statement of Paideia NOS GSoM

According to the new purpose statement, Paideia NOS GSoM has the ambition "*to become the business school recognized globally as the most innovative and committed to building a responsible society. Rooted in Milan, present everywhere*." The company's new role is therefore based on three core values: being passionate innovators, humble professionals, and respectful partners. The new purpose also informs the development of new strategic priorities. Inspiring students to think creatively and responsibly about their future decisions by working with the entire network of stakeholders in education. Innovating the content and delivery methods of NOS's offerings, to better adapt these to the needs of present-day learners as well as those of the global community.

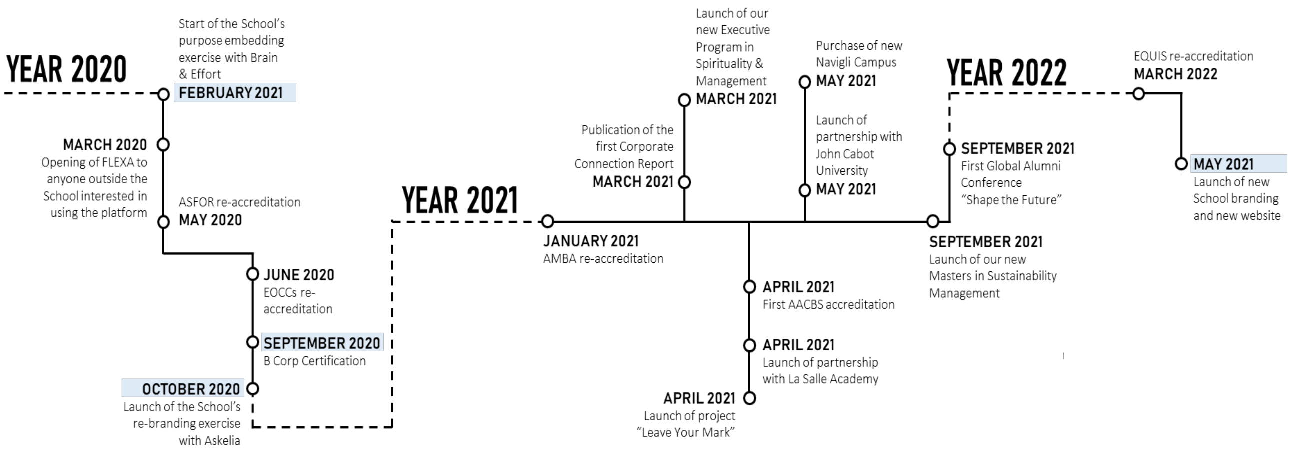


Figure 1. Timeline of the main events of 2020-2022 NOS corporate transformation

3.2 Data Collection

To comprehend how purpose is embedded into the NOS and afterwards extract a full model from that context, the focus of this investigation is on those people who have experienced the change and lived with its consequences on a daily basis.

Therefore, it is essential to create a thorough analysis of the process, based on the qualitative data gathered and revised through a series of interviews promoted among NOS employees at all levels of hierarchy. To ensure that the qualitative data could be abstracted and made as specific and objective as possible, the process is rigorous and completed in phases.

Thus, it is now necessary to clearly explain how the empirical evidence is obtained and unequivocally clarify the circumstances of data collection, to weaken the usual critics moved to qualitative research regarding the poor scientificity of the method.

3.2.1 Qualitative and Quantitative Perspectives

In a quantitative approach, problems are described and solved using numbers. Emphasis is therefore placed on collecting numerical data, summarizing them, and drawing analytical and explicit conclusions from them. Hence, in a quantitative approach, measurement of the data is critical, and often any factors that cannot be measured correctly or easily are excluded from the analysis because they are irregular and/or unclear.

Contrarily, in a qualitative approach, the protagonist is the behaviour of people as individuals, in groups, and in organizations. Qualitative analysis is often characterized by the difficulty of describing data in numerical terms and is therefore likely to use illustrative examples, generalizations and case studies. The qualitative approach can use a variety of methods such as observation and written responses to unstructured questions. Qualitative data are generally in the form of texts and are often transcripts of interviews observations, or video recordings.

Quantitative research is developed with a deductive theoretical approach, is configured as testing and evaluative, and consistently "reads" what data measurements show akin to theory. In contrast, qualitative analysis is inductive, characterized by an attempt to extrapolate a theory that is adequately grounded in a set of evidence that is captured in a non-unique form and therefore reworked. A qualitative approach, insofar as it is inductive, is an interpretive approach. In a qualitative analysis, instead, the process of analysis requires continuous, multi-step attempts to make sense of, and channel into a coherent theory, the textual evidence based on the collected evidence.

An interpretive, inductive approach to empirical social research needs a specific change in the role of the researcher vis-à-vis the study context and the “data”. The qualitative researcher becomes an integral part of the study because the point of view from which the phenomenon or process under analysis is observed is subject to the researcher's own choices and reworking. Consequently, this gives unconstrained answers to the problem. That is not to say, however, that the qualitative analysis approach should be regarded as unanalytical and unscientific. Indeed, according to the Danish physicist and 1922 Nobel Prize winner, Niels Bohr, the subject of measurement is actively involved in the experimental evaluation of a phenomenon. The researcher’s attempt to measure a physical system will always perturb that system by changing its measurable characteristics. In other words, according to what is the first definition of quantum physics, every measurement is relative to the measurer himself. Therefore, it could be said that the analysis of nature, which is possible to carry out at the subatomic level, is nothing more than a continuous qualitative analysis.

3.2.2 Qualitative Research

The qualitative approach takes the form of multi-method research, as it uses more than one method to collect data and analyse a given phenomenon. This type of research uses an interpretive and naturalistic approach to the topic (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). As pointed out earlier, the interpretive approach relies on interactions between the researcher and the participants who contribute to the data collection. Interactions that aim to maintain as much of the underlying significance of the qualitative data gathered from and about the participants. The naturalistic approach, on the other hand, requires that a plurality of perspectives on reality are present in sociological research and that each is influenced by the social context and environment. For this reason, the perspective of the process under analysis may be different depending on the subject of its experience.

Qualitative research is often an in-situ study, that is, it tends to analyse phenomena in the environments in which they take place, and moreover it wants to understand the observed reality directly from the subjects who have experienced it first-hand. It poses questions about how and why social experience develops and acquires meaning as well as creates images of the world that make it visible. Finally, qualitative research is particularly difficult to frame because of its flexibility.

3.2.3 Templates in qualitative research

Qualitative research has often been the subject of much criticism regarding its lack of "scientificity," the so-called "*lack of a model*" (Pratt, 2009). Indeed, the qualitative approach has norms, formats, rules of analysis, and methods of writing and publishing that are neither uniform nor established.

However, the aspect of interpretation and revision by the researcher is not a constraint on the trustworthiness or rigor of research, and in this sense at least two models for conducting qualitative analysis have emerged in recent years:

1. The first is the *Eisenhardt method*, which is usually associated with multiple case study analysis (Eisenhardt, 1989);
2. The second is the *Gioia method*, referred to as "*Grounded theory*" (Corley and Gioia, 2004).

The grounded theory approach is characterized by high accuracy: it requires a complex model but is affected by low generalisability. Context is rigorously analysed, yet because it is based on a single case, it makes it difficult to develop a theory that is generically applicable to other organizations. "*The purpose [of grounded theory] is ultimately to construct a theoretical explanation by specifying phenomena in terms of the conditions that generate them, how they are expressed through action/interaction, the consequences that result, and variations in these qualifiers*." (Corbin & Strauss, 1990: 9)

A grounded model relies on data, and data must be collected, analysed, reinterpreted, and explained. The Gioia method requires showing how the study fills an important gap in the literature. This method presents the structure of the data by emphasizing second-order themes and general dimensions. The research must be presented as a narrative: Actually, the story is presented in the first section, and extra citations are included in the tables in the second part.

This method differs from the Eisenhardt one because it focuses on a single case rather than multiple cases. Epistemologically, it is based on interpretive assumptions and its purpose is to capture and model the meanings of informants. Its output is a new concept, not intended to test a previous idea.

The basic principles of grounded theory are:

i. Theoretical sampling of informants, episodes, and situations is oriented to represent concepts, not people. Highest emphasis is placed on the research question.

ii. Constant comparison between data collection and analysis. These two phases are not separate moments of the study but are parts of an iterative cycle. The initial analysis directs the next cycle of data collection.

iii. Concepts are the basic unit of analysis.

iv. "Categories" must be developed and related; in fact, they are formed by groups of conceptual labels that become increasingly abstract (Corbin and Strauss, 1990).

3.2.4 Familiarization with the Context and Reconstruction of Events

A range of data are gathered from various sources for the benefit of this study. The following are examined in order to get the essential data on the context, conducts, operational and cultural results of the process under analysis:

a) 14 semi-structured interviews with NOS employees. NOS's top management, long-time and short-time employees, staff and faculty personnel are conducted together with people belonging to partner companies in the transformation process, such as Brain & Effort, Askelia and Vitana. Interviews were performed from October 2021 to April 2022. This is done by following the snowball sampling technique to identify the most suitable research subjects to be interviewed. In particular, people who have been questioned were asked to suggest alternative profiles they think have a thorough comprehension of the subjects and process being analysed;

b) Observations gathered while attending Brain & Effort workshops;

The analysis and reworking of the sources, especially the interviews, makes it possible to structure a clear and in-depth view of the embedding purpose process underwent by NOS. Being able to gather viewpoints from all relevant angles of business change and being as objective as possible required a range of sources with different provenances.

The formal interviews constitute the direct expression of thoughts, beliefs, and subjective interpretations of those who have and are experiencing the change, having the concrete perception of the benefits and limitations brought about. The direct experience of those involved in the process is a crucial variable for the credibility and reliability of the interpretation of the data. From these interviews, transcribed and analysed, an in-depth understanding of the NOS case is sought, highlighting trends, peculiarities and tensions that have characterized corporate change. A set of evidence is therefore extrapolated from this data base. These may then be used as a generic description of an efficient process of purpose embedding inside a business school.

3.3 Data Analysis

3.3.1 Interviews

The interviews are conducted with the assistance of two academics from Paideia, and the respondents are both NOS members and external participants in the purpose embedding process. During the interviews, notes are taken, and the main concepts that emerged from the interviewees' responses are isolated.

The interview protocol is divided in two parts. The first part is focused on understanding what the interviewee's background is: what was her past and current role in NOS (or in the partner company), how she came in contact with the business school and what is her perception of the NOS context. The objectives of this phase are twofold: To make respondents feel comfortable in order to obtain the most unbiased responses possible, and to begin an initial investigation of the NOS context. Examples of the information sought in this initial phase include the development of the business school through time, the training and values established and existing in the NOS culture prior to the transformation in analysis, and the perceived external reputation.

The second part is centred more explicitly and directly on the objective of the research: the extrapolation of information regarding how the NOS's embedding purpose process affected the subject and what his or her perception of the whole is. In particular, the discussion is expanded to include the topic under study and the characteristics that are relevant to the research using a series of broad questions. Often the conversation presents different tones depending on the nature and level of interviewer-interviewee confidence and trust created. Some interviews highlight practical examples of how the business transformation has impacted the subjects' private and/or professional lives. Others give more importance to reflections on the process undertaken and the methods adopted to disseminate it internally. Other interviews, which are more conceptual in nature, compare the new values to their viewpoint and are centred on the idea of purpose. In all interviews, special attention is paid to details in reference to consequences and critical issues felt in the day-to-day. At this point, the interviewer merely makes comments or asks for clarification on certain ideas to encourage the interviewee to use their logic. The interviewer's role is reduced to simply listening and passively collecting details, leaving the interviewee free to speak and to range along the concepts covered.

Each interview is subsequently re-listened and transcribed verbatim.

3.3.2 Coding

After the interviews are recorded, it is required to filter them by examining the relevant information and potential data patterns. This process is called coding. In concrete terms, coding assigns each data item - a passage from an interview - a label that describes and classifies that data segment. The labels used for coding data segments are called qualitative codes. Qualitative codes separate data segments, name them in concise terms, and propose analytical management to develop abstract ideas for interpreting each data segment (Charmaz, 2006:45).

Codes should refer to the data clearly and should describe the text segments, to which they are linked, summarizing their content, and highlighting key details for searching. Codes should be as brief and clear as possible, but should not sacrifice the completeness of the analysis to the summary of the text. The goal of the coding process is to move from free statements, present in transcribed conversations, to analytical interpretations useful for research. Coding, therefore, takes the form of the first and fundamental step toward developing a theoretical model capable of explaining and giving meaning to the qualitative data collected.

The coding process goes through four steps:

1. Data reduction. The collected material is selected, condensed, and simplified to facilitate the analysis and study of the case treated;
2. Data visualization. The reduced data are organized and compressed into a table that is easy to handle. For thid analysis, an Excel document in which the data are given in the form of text segments and with reference to the identification number of the interview to which they belonged;
3. Categorization of the data. Each data segment (organized in the Excel file) is assigned a qualitative code that describes its content and allows various data segments to be associated with a range of information categories. Categorization is carried out on three code levels moving from a high level of description and specificity to increasingly generic and synthetic categorization (first order codes, second order codes, and aggregate dimensions);

4. Data contextualization. At this stage, the categorized information is joined and connected through a pattern of relationships that emerged from the study of data categories.

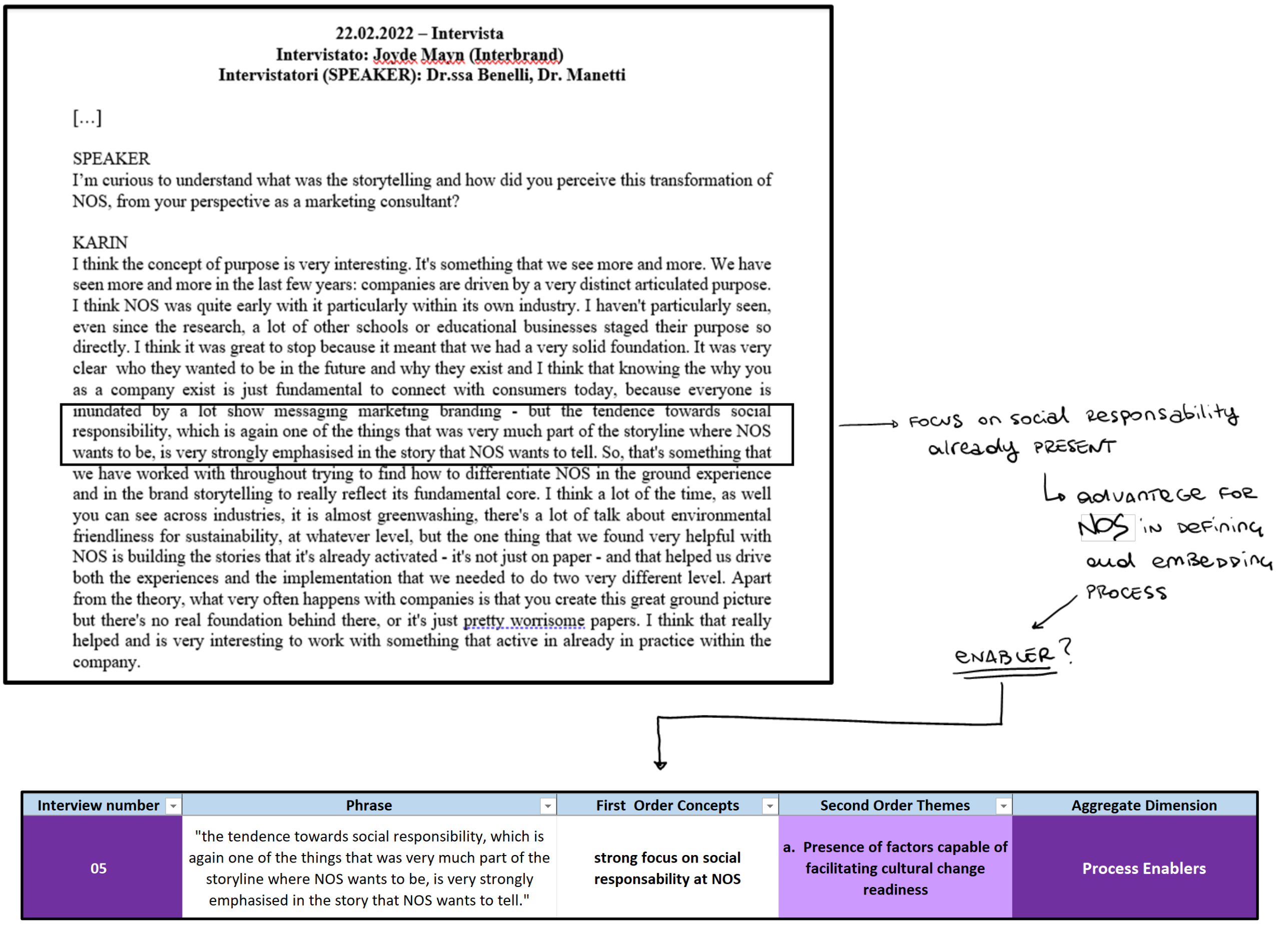
Corbin and Strauss (1990) suggest an iterative process of data analysis based on the sequence of three types of coding: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding.

Open coding involves textual data being divided and analysed piecemeal from the transcripts and evidence collected. The segments under analysis are associated with the qualitative codes that define their conceptual categories and subcategories. Codes are developed on three levels, from a more descriptive and specific label to a more general and analytical one: first order codes, second order codes, and aggregate dimensions.

Selective coding, on the other hand, is characterized by the integration of all categories around a "central" category. Categories that are unrelated to a connection with the central category and need further explanation are either completed in the description or eliminated.

In axial coding, categories are associated with properties, and connections between categories are the result of testing with additional data.

For the purpose of this research model, it is decided to develop open-ended coding.



22.02.2022 – Intervista
Intervistato: Joyde Mayn (Interbrand)
Intervistatori (SPEAKER): Dr.ssa Benelli, Dr. Manetti

[...]

SPEAKER
I'm curious to understand what was the storytelling and how did you perceive this transformation of NOS, from your perspective as a marketing consultant?

KARIN
I think the concept of purpose is very interesting. It's something that we see more and more. We have seen more and more in the last few years: companies are driven by a very distinct articulated purpose. I think NOS was quite early with it particularly within its own industry. I haven't particularly seen, even since the research, a lot of other schools or educational businesses staged their purpose so directly. I think it was great to stop because it meant that we had a very solid foundation. It was very clear who they wanted to be in the future and why they exist and I think that knowing the why you as a company exist is just fundamental to connect with consumers today, because everyone is inundated by a lot show messaging marketing branding - but the tendence towards social responsibility, which is again one of the things that was very much part of the storyline where NOS wants to be, is very strongly emphasised in the story that NOS wants to tell. So, that's something that we have worked with throughout trying to find how to differentiate NOS in the ground experience and in the brand storytelling to really reflect its fundamental core. I think a lot of the time, as well you can see across industries, it is almost greenwashing, there's a lot of talk about environmental friendliness for sustainability, at whatever level, but the one thing that we found very helpful with NOS is building the stories that it's already activated - it's not just on paper - and that helped us drive both the experiences and the implementation that we needed to do two very different level. Apart from the theory, what very often happens with companies is that you create this great ground picture but there's no real foundation behind there, or it's just pretty worrisome papers. I think that really helped and is very interesting to work with something that active in already in practice within the company.

Interview number	Phrase	First Order Concepts	Second Order Themes	Aggregate Dimension
05	"the tendence towards social responsibility, which is again one of the things that was very much part of the storyline where NOS wants to be, is very strongly emphasised in the story that NOS wants to tell."	strong focus on social responsability at NOS	a. Presence of factors capable of facilitating cultural change readiness	Process Enablers

Figure 2. Example of coding process from interview analysis to codes definition (reported names are fictitious)

First order coding. First order codes are qualitative codes that attempt to describe data segments descriptively and analytically. Each interview segment is associated with a first label that describes the essential details that emerge from the text. In some cases, the first order codes are very close to the reference text, its content and the terms used by the interviewee. In other situations, they are more concise and less complex because the data segment is long, at the expense of information that could only be extrapolated through a post-processing filter. In each case, first order codes are associated with the text segments to highlight the particularity and details of information they present for research purposes, beginning to bring out the analytical content from the textual and qualitative data.

Second order coding. Second order coding is carried out on the previously defined first-order codes. The goal of this coding is to begin abstracting the specific content that emerged from the individual data under analysis toward a primordial theoretical structure. The themes or regions that characterize the process under investigation have not yet been determined, but second order coding groups the first-order codes into thematic areas along a logical thread, such as similarity in content and comparable areas of concern. In other words, second order codes take the form of an extrapolation of the themes that emerged from the interviews, and highlight the similarity between some first order codes, grouping them into a common category that is neither too broad nor too rigid.

These macro-areas are very important for the analysis because they allow a first step toward categorizing the information in order to create the final model.

Aggregate dimensions. Aggregate dimensions are third order codes that define the themes into which the second order codes converge. Again, an attempt is made to generalize the macro-areas identified in order to define the major themes that emerged from the analysis of the interviews. These aggregated dimensions, as well as the temporal and cause-and-effect relationships that exist and are found among them, form the basis of the model of inquiry around the investigated process.

The identification of second order codes and aggregate dimensions is carried out through an iterative process. In fact, identifying one of the two coding levels simplify and speed up the extrapolation of the other, increasing the shaping of the model based on the data segments. First, general macro-themes are identified using first-order codes, and from there, second-order codes are viewed as a sort of link between the two levels. Next, the second order codes are analysed to group and associate them with new aggregate dimensions that are more specific to the model than the previously assumed macro-themes. From these new aggregate dimensions, the work of extrapolating second order codes is then repeated. The process is repeated until a second order code and aggregate dimension structure is considered suitable for the model's needs.

To give a practical example of this process let us consider the interview segment shown in Figure 2: "*the tendency toward social responsibility, which is one of the things that was very much part of the storyline where NOS wants to be, is very strongly emphasized in the story that NOS wants to tell*" (segment A, interview 05). The first step is to clarify in detail what the passage shows by giving a first order code, in this case: "strong focus on social responsibility at NOS". Once the concept of the passage is described, it is abstracted to a possible macro-theme referring to it. In this case, the advantages of having a strong sense of social responsibility are taken into account while considering the process of embedding purpose. Therefore, "Change facilitators" is chosen as the macro-theme. After this step, it is observed that other data segments can also be traced back to this or related macro-themes. Therefore, an attempt is made to analyse what are the differences and similarities between different segments of the same macro-theme. According to the analysis conducted, two segments belonging to the same macro-theme may be:

- "*The name had no meaning at all and so we also did an architecture and naming exercise with Elio in the team. The first thing that came out from this community was 'we don't know what NOS means. We don't know what it stands for'"* (segment B, interview 05) with first order code 'lack of meaning in the name NOS'
- "*Paradoxically, being a business school of an engineering school makes you think less about the fact that you can change, it makes it easier for you to consider trying an alternative positioning*" (segment C, interview 08) with first order code 'Technical Business School advantage: easier to change'

Segments A and C express a cultural advantage for change, whereas segment B states more of a motivation to have to put change into reality. After evaluating the similarities and differences between segments A, B, and C, it is determined that these segments share this trait. Therefore, the second order code for segments A and C is defined as “Facilitating cultural readiness” and for segment B as “Digesting the need to shift gears”. The macro theme "Change facilitators" is then renamed to "Process Enablers," which is more appropriate for characterizing the codes in the context of the model under investigation. This is done after deciding which second order works best for the different segments.

3.3.3 Theorization of the model

The model changed several times and various sketches were made. A model is a specific kind of representation of reality:

- The goal of the model and its intended audience must be clear. In this case, the model aims to identify key phases in the NOS purpose embedding process while abstracting a practical framework for modelling a business school's purpose embedding process. The model must reframe the concepts in order to derive a theory from them, rather than just providing a description of a specific event or topic.
- It must be straightforward without becoming simplistic. To create a comprehensive model, it is crucial to provide a succinct depiction of reality that incorporates all the important concepts without being trivial. Social phenomena in particular may appear to be both simple and complicated depending on how you look at them.
- It should have a narrative flow, with connections between ideas that are obvious. Just by looking at the model, the reader should be able to understand the thesis.

The grounded method used to build the model necessitates the interpretation of informants. As a result, it is essential to use secondary sources and archive references to triangulate the data as much as feasible.

3.3.4 Grounded Theory Conclusions

The volume of data gathered is never enough for a qualitative researcher. New data are usually helpful for both determining whether concepts from earlier study still hold true in light of new information and for suggesting potential alteration to some categories in order to take another viewpoint into account when building the model. Thus, it is important to keep patterns and variances in mind; curiosity is the key to recognizing when additional analysis is required since the facts do not fit. There is no code or language that would never change; provisional propositions are continuously being updated.

Writing is a component of analysis since it aids in the conceptualization of ideas. It is beneficial to have a greater understanding of the environment in which NOS operated since in this way, numerous elements, including monetary conditions, cultural norms, business strategies, and many others, can be taken into account. A detailed explanation of the theory being developed is necessary for grounded theory. The way the model's components work together and interact is crucial. When theoretical saturation is reached, that is, when no new information significantly alters the explanatory framework, the search process comes to an end.

To establish the analytical generalizability of the findings, it is critical to find support in comparable research that are connected to the current study. In qualitative research, the researcher's position goes beyond that of a simple observer of phenomena, and his task goes beyond just describing what he sees. Interpreting the data is important in order to choose how to frame the thesis.

Findings

4.1 Past evolution and starting context

In this section, NOS staff interviews are used to study the cultural positioning and context that existed in NOS at the start of the embedding purpose process. The study finds that a cultural and commercial backdrop served as the initial setting for the transformation. In fact, the respondents stress how the company's culture and propensity for innovation developed in various ways during the course of the three key eras of the previous NOS presidencies: Cattaneo presidency, Conti presidency, and finally Baresi presidency, under which the transformation was initiated and is being accomplished.

4.1.1 Cattaneo Presidency

NOS began to establish itself in the global rankings of business schools under the Cattaneo presidency and started the process of internationalization that has led it to the current day. Evidence suggests that Filippo Cattaneo's administration is responsible for the school's creative and experimental culture. Indeed, this period of time appears to have been marked by what may be described as a start-up environment, made possible by a strong desire to advance and innovate. According to the interviewees, *"(with Cattaneo) there was an absurd charge, an office with real professionals [...], but a lot of motivation and charge*" (interview 04)[3]. In particular, Filippo Cattaneo had a reputation for being fair: "*He could also scream at you [...] but he would do so because he was fair*" (interview 10). A feeling of fairness and meritocracy that pervaded

[3] With a view to maintaining anonymity, for each interview citation, only the interview number related to the citation is reported in the paper. A table with a brief description of each interviewee's role is provided in the Appendix to give a clearer idea of the perspective from which each quote came

this period appears to have permeated both culture and leadership. According to interviewees, "*He (Cattaneo) embodied purpose. If there was something to be done, it was done […] (He) didn't care. Fairness in person*" (interview 10). Participation and transparency were also demonstrated. According to interviewees "(*Cattaneo) was extremely explicit in his assessment of our performance. He was quite clear about our objectives regardless of how we were doing.* " (interview 10). As dean of NOS, Professor Filippo Cattaneo is remembered as a guy who was enthusiastic about his profession and capable of inspiring the personnel and the entire atmosphere: "*I fell in love with education thanks to him [...] He really transmitted to me the passion for education […] seeing the kids growing, changing, then becoming more and more rounded people both personally and professionally*" (interview 10). "*The perception is that during Filippo's (Cattaneo) time there was a strong sense of direction, what the school wanted to be, a strong sense of independence and experimentation*" (interview 08). Staff from NOS who were there at the time claim "*you really had the possibility of experimentation […] there was a safeguard of error and therefore the possibility of being wrong*" (interview 03). Indeed, error was a key building block for experimenting and innovating - "*There was protection that enabled you to turn within and reconsider some of the choices you had made. The error persisted, you realized it, corrected it, and then you had the chance to change*" (interview 08). Evidence, therefore, led to characterizing the Cattaneo presidency with a kind of *"great driving force of those who, as young people, also saw school as a space where they could experiment and do things that were not necessarily tied to the rigid education and structure of the university.*"

4.1.2 Conti Presidency

On the other side, the era under the leadership of Professor Beniamino Conti was one that "*after this first somewhat inertial phase of push, actually what has probably been missing the most, [...] is this sense of direction, of push, of stimulus*" (interview 08). A period that is described as characterized by a slowdown and a loss of the innovativeness and experimentation characteristic of the Cattaneo period. "*In some ways we have entered a phase of management that tended to consolidate, systematize, streamline activities. However, that propulsion has been lost*." (interview 10). According to interviewees, a possible motivation for the increasing tendency toward management over innovation could be traced to the mode of succession that occurred between Cattaneo and Conti. Professor Cattaneo's sudden death may have placed Professor Conti in a condition that "*he found himself having to do it. He was probably more oriented to the business part, especially international development. That's what his big mission was*" (interview 12). According to employees, this phase was “*not very generative in terms of ideas. […] much more conservative in its approach to risk*" (interview 08). As a result, it negatively impacted employee commitment within NOS. Moreover, "*in the long run it flattened a little bit that creative spirit, but also a little bit that spirit of work fizz that was there before. It led the staff to be a little less motivated*" (interview 08). According to this study, the Conti presidency is regarded as a time of organizational and corporate solidification, at the price of the dynamism that defined the earlier administration.

4.1.3 Baresi Presidency

"*With the third phase, the transition to Elio (Baresi) and the current team, really came back a strong direction, understood as a point of ambition [...], a greater push for innovation, even a bit chaotic*" (interview 08). With these words, one of the interviewees describes the period spent

with Professor Baresi as NOS dean - a period that is still ongoing. According to the evidence, the latter period resumes that innovative trend that was characteristic of the early Cattaneo period. However, the significant change that has appeared in recent years is related to the organizational structure that the new management chose to implement. Professor Baresi was able to "*create an organizational set-up with its functions already structured*" and he "*immediately wanted and fostered an organizational culture that was very different from what was there before, where everything was more artisanal, where everything was a bit rough*" (interview 14). People who worked and currently work at NOS during this time claim that the Baresi presidency mostly succeeded in making tangible and organized the expansion and innovation that Cattaneo first openly legitimized. " *What I did not anticipate and what I very much appreciated was the implementation of a strategic plan that, in my knowledge, had never existed, at least not in such a visible or widespread manner*" (interview 12).
However, the research indicates that the increased demand for innovation and the need to better structure processes clash with a culture that is not as fresh as Cattaneo's but rather the result of the evolution of many workplace environments. This new leadership and its transformative mandate seem to have brought a cultural trend whereby everything is urgent: "*The problem is that it's all priority, everything tomorrow, everything now*" (interview 10). From some evidence it also appears that “*there is less push or stimulus from the people at the lower level*" (interview 03) that leads to a preference for performing one's own task and feeling satisfied, without a real push for an overall understanding of the company strategy and a more collective personal commitment.

In conclusion, the NOS environment that approached the business transformation under examination is described as one that, after a time of substantial experimental flexibility and creative inquiry and a later more managerial ordering, is in a phase of fresh aspiration. An established and well-known business school, where the drive for innovation is apparent in almost every interviewee's thinking, but which seems to be challenged by a type of "culture of one's own backyard" widespread among certain individuals.

4.2 Mechanisms of Purpose embedding

In accordance with the analysis of the interviews, four mechanisms of purpose embedding enable the newly created Paideia NOS GSoM to infuse purpose. In this section, findings related to these mechanisms are presented, describing the steps NOS has taken to carry out the process. Starting with an initial need to make the process consistent with the company and its culture, the evidence outlines a strategy for putting employees, who are internal stakeholders in the transformation, at the centre of it. This strategy is based on making sure that the steps that need to be followed are clear and creating a climate that is open to change.

4.2.1 Making the process consistent with the context and vice versa

The initial mechanism of purpose embedding that emerges from the research is connected to a preliminary and natural activity of establishing the context for the process. The transformation, indeed, started with a mere analysis of the external context in the company's market. "*We started to look for strategic insights, to understand what the market was thinking.*" (interview 05). The impetus for change, that was already there at the strategic level in the NOS, appears to have been affected and strengthened by this external study. According to the interviews, the "*discourse of purpose had started from where we want to go, what turnover we want to do, what programs we want to launch*" (interview 14) and was never some kind of 'whim' born out of an external social impulse. "*The concept of purpose is kind of rooted in the fact that you built a strategic plan from the why*" (interview 14) and that is why the company's board had already initially pushed the future direction on this path. A strong push even though "*we had decided to do a three-year strategic plan and we didn't have in mind how it would evolve*" (interview 14). A strong decision, but necessary in order to consistently and correctly direct the company toward change. This solid and direct interest of NOS's top management in the transformation led to the necessity to setting the stage for the purpose embedding process. In this regard, the data demonstrates that they made internal efforts to create and combine a number of arrangements necessary to enable the embedding purpose process. These strategies seem to be more of a collection of requirements for the process under examination to establish itself correctly and permanently.

At the organizational level, it is essential to make purpose and business model consistent with each other. In particular, being a business school, special attention must be given to the academic and knowledge dissemination arena. The channel through which future programs and lectures are to be developed must be shaped and impacted by the direction intended. The interviews highlight this very need: "*the transformation has to be very articulated; it has to get to the programs; it has to get to the way you position yourself outwardly. [...] To do this you have to build a palimpsest of reasoning, a structure that accompanies the content*" (interview 08). However, it is necessary to emphasize how this alignment in content and training proposal aimed at the outside world must also be reflected in the NOS's internal consciousness. Indeed, during the research, reference is made to how it is necessary to create a clear internal awareness of what the direction should be. In this sense, quoting one of the interviews, "*the challenge is: if some concepts that I expressed could be expressed by everyone it means that we all have a shared language. If we all have the shared language, we have that awareness*" (interview 14). Almost as a direct consequence, another factor that often appear during the analysis of the interviews is related to leadership and team building. In particular, the need to put into practice on a personal and, consequently, on team level, all those tools that are made available by NOS and Brain & Effort. Personal tools that are used with the right coherence and awareness only when they are guided in intelligent motion and combined with the exchange of experiences in the social and work context. In fact, "*Although it (the workshop with Bain & Effort) had initially only been available online - making it tough to incorporate -, once we were present, we realized that it had really sowed well and had yielded returns in terms of effect, daily behaviour, and work.*" (interview 12). Last but not least, an important finding concerns organizational practices and processes. In particular, the informants underline the need to reform the performance measurement system. In the interviews, it emerges how it was necessary and still is that "*the KPI on which to measure the individual action […] has to be reasoned well because the risk is to belittle it too much or to give too much emphasis*" (interview 08). To reframe the social role and purpose of the corporation, both personal and corporate performance appear to be important. In this sense, "*a collaboration was initiated a year ago [...] to redefine the performance appraisal system, trying to bring it back as much as possible to what the values are in substance. The idea was to separate performance in terms of "how" - so behaviours - from economic bonuses, to give greater freedom of expression in feedback to everyone, without them feeling constrained in doing so by the possible economic implication of their feedback*" (interview 01). A new direction to take to consider new evaluation methods that are more in line with the objectives of the ongoing transformation. In this regard, an alternate measurement to the conventional one that that firm still uses today is provided when speaking with representatives of the partner company Vitana. At Vitana, happiness is a core value, and equally crucial becomes the ability to measure its level. "*Periodically we ask ourselves how happy we are on a scale of 0 to 10 [...] When we are faced with an important decision, we ask ourselves whether it improves or worsens our happiness. The value is such when it becomes a watershed for making decisions, so it gives you a reference*" (interview 06).

4.2.2 Clarifying actions and direction to be taken

According to the interviews, there appears to be a special attention on outlining the activities and direction that must be followed to effectively accomplish the transition, almost consequential to the necessity to set the stage of the process. Indeed, the data makes it evident that the embedding purpose process is connected to a number of measures intended to create a solid and clear environment. The programs and educational proposal outside the business school appear to be the first area of action where it is required to specify the objectives and course of action to be done. "*We also changed all our brochures to include this whole part (consistency with the new values) as well*" (interview 11). "*You are starting to include modules related to purpose, also with activities directly carried out by Brain & Effort*" (interview 04). Thus, finding the appropriate target audience and modality is important for expressing consistency and introducing purpose into programs in the proper way: "*I know that mainly they are working on the full-time MBA. These are very high issues and we have said 'maybe it makes more sense to (apply them on) executive (programs).' [...] these candidates are people with on average 7-8 but even more years of work experience so they are extremely interested in these themes, and they grasp more broadly the sense of having impact*" (interview 04).

The inclusion of purpose in programs, both as a set-up and as a clarifier of the process' direction, seems to be part of a broader spectrum effort to channel everyone's energies and visions. Indeed, the interviews show how it is not enough to define values at the corporate and image level, but "*paradoxically it is much more complex the next step, which is to go from these high statements to putting them into practice. Because then all this is true until you tell me that I have to change my course"* (interview 08). According to interviewees, it is not so much the value manifesto but what is behind it. "*For example, having "respect for the partner" in building a valuable relationship with colleagues lies in being on his or her side, thus taking responsibility, but also being forthcoming and clear in confrontation*" (interview 13). The transformation leads not only to the definition of new values, but also to the definition of specific, culturally sanctioned behaviours that reflect those values. Equally obvious is the effort undertaken by NOS to foster internal alignment in order to put the new purpose into action, with the assistance of partner organization Brain & Effort. "*I perceive it so much internally where we are aligned and so we are all clear about what our values. The goal is to put ourselves out there to respond to those values*" (interview 13). "*I found it particularly inspiring to reflect on the aspects of purpose and the status with which you approach a problem [...] the creation of the team through this mechanism paradoxically bonded us more than perhaps it did before*" (interview 03). This last interview further highlights the critical role that teams and their training play in the alignment and coherence process. And in this regard, the workshops and tools given by external partners are considered crucial by the interviewees. "*I did a more structured workshop of three or four days and that's where certain dynamics, certain themes, [...] started to become a clearer because reflected more in the daily activity. [...] Now in my mind it's clearer how the evolution was, whereas at the time it was all very confused and at the same time also difficult to decipher*" (interview 02). What appears from the analysis of the evidence, therefore, seems to be a recognized need for clarification and alignment of actions to make concrete the definition of values made a priori. Apparently essential to the right and basic internal engagement in transformation is this activity.

4.2.3 Fostering a change-friendly environment

The effort done by NOS to "prepare" the workplace for the new transformation is another purpose embedding mechanism that can be inferred from the data. In particular, the interviews highlight three different aspects on which NOS worked - with the help of Brain & Effort - to create the best work environment for the embedding purpose process.

First, there is an evident attempt to create a kind of corporate intrapreneurship within the Business School. This term identifies all those corporate processes aimed at nurturing the formation and development of innovative and entrepreneurial ideas within organizational walls. In this sense, the evidence gathered regarding the role taken by middle management help us to comprehend their significance during the transition. "*It came through the figures of my two managers [...] my manager asked me and gave me positive feedback concerning this attitude of being more proactive and encouraged me to pursue it*" (interview 02). What becomes clear is that employees are required to play an active part in communicating the purpose, refining existing methods, and suggesting new ones, rather than just accept the new ideals and behave in accordance with them.

Second, a complementary aspect appears to be the promotion of an open working environment. Quoting one of the interviews, there are three souls within NOS: "*the more technical and research soul - the idea is that you learn directly from those who are in the labs - , and there is also the softer component - which is having more and more relevance, especially at the executive level within companies - and then the digital soul per se - which instead accompanies all the renewal processes that are taking place*" (interview 04). For the transformation to effectively be rooted, these three spirits must work together in harmony. From this point of view, the decision to create a common, cross-departmental perspective seems to have been appreciated by NOS employees. "*I think they (workshops) helped us to build a more shared perception and reflect the various perspectives of interaction as well, so going out of the self but thinking more broadly*" (interview 03). According to the respondents, aiming for more transparency in the workplace seems beneficial, particularly given the cross-disciplinary engagement of many teams. An openness approach that started in the Brain & Effort workshops and persisted throughout the day-to-day grind. "*I appreciated working with a group that I am not used to working with; therefore, also opening up with people I am not familiar with. [...]*

teams were used to working separately and also used to very different ways of working. Now I think hardly anyone would distinguish who is coming from one team and who is coming from the other. It was just a very happy merger. I would say almost successful" (interview 02). To do this, the work with external partners and the tools provided during the transition such as "*some tools on communication, on meeting management, that were very practical, appeared very useful.*" (interview 02).

Third, an additional factor that emerges from the evidence is the push for a higher feedback culture and personal care, which supports corporate intrapreneurship and an open work environment. The following interview gives an example of this trend: "*The work with Brain & Effort has been a really beneficial path that has increased my consciousness as well as the awareness and closeness of my co-workers. [...] with no qualms about opening up without barriers. With this approach of openness, a greater glue was created–with colleagues*" (interview 01). Throughout the interviews, references are made to this aspect of feedback and tools that Brain & Effort gave during their training and how they are being used in the daily work routine to promote openness. "*It has become a much more honest relationship both in terms of giving and in terms of asking and I have to say that this thing was actually a barrier. [...] people have also become more confident in giving feedbacks to you, to tell you if something is wrong or if something could be done differently. [...] So we have entered into a relationship that is much more honest, sincere, much more trusting in the optics of helping each other, giving each other feedback* " (interview 12). To put it another way, what becomes clear from the interviews is NOS's determined and effective endeavour to establish a feedback culture that can support the other two aspects noted in the interviews and discussed above.

4.2.4 Placing people at the centre of the change

A heightened interest in individuals, who seem to be participating in the process even and particularly in their human aspect, is the last evident embedding purpose mechanism that emerges from the interviews. The workshops and resources NOS and Brain & Effort provided throughout the transition appear to have placed a heavy emphasis on developing individuals and their value to the process itself. The goal seems to be to instil greater confidence and awareness of purpose in the company's employees by giving importance to each individual's values in order to make them part of and stimulus to those of the company. It feels that the strategy has at least won the respect and approval of those engaged, as "*it was about discovering how good it is to harmonize a more human and more personal component with technical skills*" (interview 06).

The analysis of the interviews highlights two main aspects of this anthropocentric approach: the importance of involving people in the process and the need to stimulate and harness employees' personal commitment and effort to make it possible. The second of these aspects emerges more as necessary for the success of the embedding purpose process. Repeatedly in the data, it is stressed how individuals from the various levels of the organization must make efforts to ensure that the given tools are used in the right way and the desired goal can be achieved. "*Brain & Effort teaches us, gives us a model, tools so that we recognize the importance of several things and we do it and when we do it, we also do it in a certain way. But it is up to us, the choice is ours, whether to do it and how to do it. If I don't do it, it's not Brain & Effort's fault because I decided not to do it* " (interview 14). "*I've taken a few courses, but none have required you to push yourself so forcefully on a personal level as this one did. These small attentions require, in my opinion, considerable effort on a personal level and if left in that context becomes a bit of a bubble that is closed there*" (interview 02). The interviews highlight the impression that using these tools to their fullest potential requires individual effort.

A personal effort that the NOS tried to push through initiatives aimed at involving and engaging people. This has often involved working more on the psychological sphere of employees. "*To give you an example, in one of these training moments one of the consultants used this expression 'to say yes to life' meaning that in life there are contingencies when you would like things to always go well but they don't. For example, you had scheduled a visit to a company, but the company says: 'look I can't anymore' and you have a week's time - even less - to reschedule, what should you do? It's not that you can stand there and complain but precisely 'say yes to life'!*" (Interview 01). Given that it would be the individual who makes the change, it would appear that the personal sphere of the individual should be given tools and prominence before the professional one. The tools given are perceived and used to really understand what values and goals each person possesses, at least according to the interviews. "*This however made us stop for a little while, at least it made me stop for a moment to reflect and to say: 'in short, I'm always chasing new goals to achieve for what reason? for what purpose'*"(Interview 11). In other words, giving importance and tools to the individual to foster a clear and precise definition of his or her personal purpose and leverage it for corporate direction.

Additionally, it appears that emphasizing individuals as the core of change is essential for resolving some of the problems pertaining to the transition itself. For example, one of the interviews explains how the tools given for the purpose embedding process are crucial in overcoming an internal conflict related to the unification of two teams forced to work together. *"They started working together, they started having to pass information to each other. Working together, in the end helped them to revaluate people. Before you had preconceived notions [...] but now they also created subgroups. These small subgroups slowly became the team with friendships even beyond the work*" (interview 12). In other words, NOS seems to have made the decision to entrust people with the responsibility of being the bearers and promoters of the value change taking place. The employees interviewed perceive this importance, giving evidence of having understood this precise centrality, helping each other, and benefiting from the tools adopted. Quoting one of the interviews, "*there were moments of [...] so much difficulty. [...] I had put myself in a kind of trap such that I questioned my own abilities and instead I was favourably surprised by the support I received, especially from a colleague who gave me a completely different view*" (interview 01).

4.3 Tensions generated in the process

The process of embedding purpose undertaken by Paideia NOS GSoM, however, has by no means been a linear process without the presence of obstacles. The research, indeed, shows evidence of several tensions that have slowed the process in its becoming and still appear to complicate a homogeneous and shared spreading of purpose in the company.

A first category of tensions is in fact generated by the structure and peculiarities of a business school, such as the annual timing with which products i.e., courses sold, are evaluated. Then, also the internal and external environment in which the NOS found itself immersed in are both slowing factors. And, likewise, the nature of a transformative process based on the creation of a new corporate purpose comes with its own set of complexities and tensions.

4.3.1 Structural Tensions related to a business school reality

Initially, according to the analysis of the interviews, the process of embedding purpose is made difficult by tensions that can be traced back to the structure and organization of the company, particularly linked to its business school nature.

First, it is often pointed out by respondents how processes within NOS are difficult to manage. "*It is about organization. Processes are a disaster*" (interview 10). This turns out to be a key aspect that converges into an objective difficulty in properly assessing and measuring the results and progresses of the process - a topic that will be discussed later. However, it is intriguing to anticipate how the inability to immediately locate data or the inability to rapidly and effectively combine those instructions coming from the stated purposes would have a significant impact on operations inside a business school. Quoting one of the interviews in fact, "*for the business school I think, unlike the many products or even service businesses, there is the problem of cycles. You launch an MBA today that will start in a year and last a year and a half*" (interview 08).

In the institutional and structural sphere, the most interesting evidence turns out to be related to the business school factor. The business school is a reality with various souls whose mutual relationship is crucial to the life of the company. In particular, the dichotomy between staff and faculty arises from the interviews. The term staff refers to the NOS staff, people who work and belong institutionally to the NOS company, taking care of its administrative and organizational management. Faculty, on the other hand, refers to the lecturers who teach in the business school and who are often not under direct contract from the school, but rather external people who render a service by teaching there. In the case under analysis, these are often professors who belong to the departments of the Paideia.

The fact that professors do not contractually belong to NOS is a very important factor according to the data analysis. "*Sometimes the changes that affect NOS do not necessarily affect the faculty, especially those who are part of NOS as a 'service provider', i.e. they are lecturers, and in some ways their involvement is limited to that*" (interview 02). The interviewees often refer to an autonomous faculty who see themselves as independent and superior to the staff, as described by the following segment, "*paradoxically the faculty is not our supplier, but is our customer in terms of how they approach themselves [...] On the one hand there are faculty who* *are extremely collaborative, on the other there are those who have this more old-fashioned approach, whereby I am the lecturer so a) I am right b) I don't do certain things - as if they are still prima donnas"* (interview 01).

This attitude of superiority on the part of faculty leads staff members to feel disrespected and denigrated in their role. *"(We staff) are often seen as the secretary of the university, so we are asked to fix the template, to bring the water bottle*" (interview 02). The causes of this disparaging treatment are traced by the interviews to a matter of cultural heritage present in NOS. For example, the interviews reveal that "*even though we, as staff, have some consideration to make [...] sometimes we are told that these are the political dynamics of NOS from which we cannot disregard*" (interview 04). This is a behaviour that seems to bring two very bad consequences for the success of the embedding purpose process: demotivation and de-empowerment of the staff. Quoting one of the interviews it becomes clear how the perceived superiority of the faculty leads to "*a very demotivating attitude coming from some faculty who maybe see the coordinators as the secretary on duty*" (interview 12). Therefore, staff members who do not feel motivated, translate it into less effort in work domains. In addition, "*staff feel in right to de-empower themselves, because leadership is in the hands of others, and this certainly has not helped - also in the past - to grow adequately*" (interview 07). The reasoning that is reconstructed from the evidence is as follows. The staff does not feel valued, plus they perceive an attitude of superiority and denigration from the faculty. Perceiving this situation as a cultural heritage, which has always been present as an unwritten law of the work environment, they unconsciously accept the situation feeling poorly motivated and de-empowered. Consequently, they do not perceive that they have any value other than accompanying and helping the faculty to create one. A passive and indirect perception.

The staff lower motivation and responsibility are the cause of low involvement and, thus, low effort from NOS employees in making the ongoing process a reality. It follows that it will only be feasible to include individuals in the reform process by resolving this gut contrast. This will be accomplished by encouraging them to exert the effort that is identified in the interviews as being essential for the company transformation's success. On the other hand, this kind of relationship between faculty and staff "*somewhat clashed with one of the values that is respect for partners*" (interview 12), highlighting a tension in embedding purpose in the organization.

4.3.2 Environmental Tensions

The findings also reveal a significant conflict relating to the company's internal and external environment. The environment in which NOS is immersed in is a deciding element in the outcome of the process being studied. Often in the interviews reference is made to certain environmental aspects that may have slowed or made the embedding purpose process more complex.

Starting with the tensions caused by the external environment, findings indicate that the Covid-19 outbreak and the actions to stop it have a significant influence on the success of the change. Indeed, according to the interviewees, "*at first it was a bit difficult (to focus on the process), indeed more than empowerment it (purpose embedding process) was experienced as a disorientation because of the concomitance with the Covid*" (interview 02). The disorientation related to the Covid period, concomitant with the transformation undertaken, is perceived negatively by interviewees who are deprived of the immediate opportunity to put into practice all those tools related to the change process. Some interviews refer to the fact that "*we should (and I don't know how) find this pick of reconnection... That is the missing point of transformation." Indeed, the connection is perceived as the missing piece. It is crucial to be able to talk among employees about the change and make it present and conscious in the work environment. Since this is a purpose-related change and therefore has values that must be* *breathed and embraced by people within the company, distancing and forced absence from the work environment turns out to be a major restraining factor for successful purpose embedding among employees.*" (interview 03). The respondents argue that the absence of a shared setting and period of conviviality makes debate and agreement over new ideals impossible. Unfortunately, the impact of Covid on the purpose embedding process is not limited to an impediment to the smooth circulation of ideas and discussion. Indeed, the employees interviewed expressed that they feel demotivated by the situation they experience because of Covid. "*We had been home for a while and losing motivation was now becoming a very close thing to the door*" (interview 11). "*The lockdown year was psychologically very hard, and I know that a lot of people experienced it psychologically badly*" (interview 12). The interviews do, in fact, demonstrate a sense of burden and demotivation brought on by experiencing the workplace in a distant and no longer social manner. In addition, "*one had returned with many expectations and was then disappointed by the fact that we did not come out of the pandemic. The problems returned more than before because the classrooms were halved so you had to do all the hybrid teaching which therefore created further complexity...*" (interview 12). In short, Covid results in several external factors that run counter to the need for people to be involved in change, which the process instead requires.

Analysis of the data highlights tensions also generated by the NOS's internal environment. The internal structure related to interpersonal relationships, hierarchical organizational chart, and the culture present in the company represent possible risks and sources of slowing down the proper completion of the process. The evidence shows four possible sources of complications due to internal environmental factors: employees' cultural biases and inertia, leadership issues, low day-to-day perception of the ongoing change and, finally, tensions related to an overwhelming environment.

NOS has been in existence for more than forty years, but its internationalization process is due only in the second half of its life. Many employees have worked at NOS for many years, have been shaped and have contributed to the creation and sedimentation of the company's culture and values. However, despite the fact that this fact contributes to upholding and spreading awareness of the company's culture and principles through time, it also creates barriers to change. In the literature, there is company's 'inertia' when the internal structure is so entrenched and structured toward its status quo that it inhibits the company's ability to see or think about change (cognitive inertia), or to understand how to make it possible (action inertia). A company's inertia to change is often linked to cultural biases present in its employees (particularly those with more years of experience), and the interviews conducted for this thesis highlighted their presence within NOS. According to the employees, "*there are still too many occasions where we fall back into the old way of thinking or attitudes that are still too ingrained*" (interview 10). Or "*people who have gone through the three phases have sedimented such inertia that they have hard time accepting the dynamic beyond their normal job*" (interview 03). The perception is that many employees "*have an approach as if to say: 'The Brain & Effort approach doesn't work'* " (interview 14). While the new company direction is about building an image and operation that aims to a broader social role than economic return, people interviewed still perceive much resistance in this direction. "*I still perceive that the focus is always on the monetary aspect, which on the one hand, in my opinion, is also the thing that turns off a little bit* " (interview 09). "*In my opinion, there is a significant segment of our faculty and staff that still reacts to this by saying 'Whatever, call it how the heck you want, we're actually doing EBIDTA'* " (interview 08). Most interviewees have the perception that, for many within the company, the transformation is nothing more than an image building process where behind the mask of purpose there is nothing more than a new way of bottling the same wine as always. In this sense, it does not help that the defined purpose is rightly shaped on values that tacitly are already partly shared in the NOS. “*We have traced much more to themes that perhaps are also drawn from earlier. [‘] 'respect for partners' is something we really use a lot now; maybe before we called it something else. However, now it's a little bit more framed*" (interview 09). Unfortunately, "*An Old Wine, New Bottle danger exists when an established purpose is given a new form. You've created a new catchphrase to describe what we already do*" (interview 08). Another factor that has incentivized inertia seems to have been the Brain & Effort approach. As mentioned earlier, for many, "*The Mind at Work approach does not work*" (interview 14). In fact, according to the interviewees, there is a gap between how the external consulting firm tried to facilitate the embedding purpose process and the actual motion in which everyday operations are handled within the NOS. "*I perceived [...] that they (Brain & Effort) tend to approach things differently than we tend to do.*" (interview 09). A cultural crash due to the two different entities involved: a business consulting firm and a technical business school. More generally, what emerges from the interviews is the need to align the language and values of purpose with the tools provided for everyday life and the way this is experienced in the particular context of a technical business school like NOS. "*Aligning the language was the most complicated thing to do because it's perfectly fine to say: ‘passionate innovator’, however what does that mean in reality?*" (interview 12). "*When the idea of purpose was presented, it was very difficult to understand it [...] for someone like me who comes from a division where you tend to be very operational. [...] I understand the social, even strategic purpose, however, I struggled to understand then in concrete terms what it meant*" (interview 12). Moreover, the problem related to inertia and cultural biases that exist within the company is reinforced by what could be called the *'paradox of the war on purpose.'* Due to the fact that setting a purpose regards ideals that are beneficial to society as a whole, the company's statement of its purpose and some specific societal values cannot be criticised by anybody. "*In front of such a purpose, in front of statements of a scope […] I don't expect a reaction like 'But oh man, what are you* *saying?!'* " (interview 08). Indeed, a change that is based on purpose is hardly subject to direct opposition. However, according to the interviews, it is precisely the absence of direct opposition that makes it difficult to break down the cultural inertia that seems to prevent new values from taking root. "*While when you have direct opposition you can counter it directly*" (interview 08). Inertia appears to be a strongly entrenched but ephemeral factor and for that very reason very difficult to break down.

A leadership issue is another intriguing finding from the research of the internal environment. For example, respondents describe an inherent problem with the governance of NOS. Being a business school, NOS has the faculty part and the staff part. According to the interviews, this is problematic because "*from the organizational point of view, our school still has the theme that leadership is in the hands of the faculty. But the faculty does not represent 100 percent NOS. So, on the one hand there is, as there were, an unquestioned leadership and on the other hand, leadership is in the hands of figures (faulty) who can also articulate their time and commitment very differently from each other*" (interview 07). Therefore, it is evident that the faculty, a temporary component of the firm, makes strategic and business decisions inside NOS, while the staff, the company's skeleton, defers decisions to the faculty, coherently with the status quo. It is almost a culturally accepted sense of inferiority. This aspect, which refers to the disempowerment of the staff discussed earlier, appears very harmful because the substratum of the company appears as the object of a decision taken by a party that has a temporally limited interest in the company itself. This situation is clear in the moments of transition between one management and the next: "*when there was the phase of transition from Conti to Baresi there was a moment when it was not clear who was going to do what*" (interview 06). The research does, however, also point to problems with leadership and middle-low management's involvement. The respondents spoke of the apparent goal-setting ambiguity that frequently diverges between executives and the operational level. During one of the interviews, this example was given: "*there is an external stakeholder, a partner of ours with whom we are working so much to get a path started on Rome – that is the first path that opens the Paideia presence in Rome -. So, the efforts have to be maximum, and I have to say that we are really committing ourselves wholeheartedly - me and my manager -, but instead, I do not see the commitment from Comex*[4] *and so I wonder 'what is the direction?*' " (interview 04). In short, the perception is that he individual is not able to understand what the priorities and directions from the top levels of the organization are. In addition, the level of leadership and the value of middle management appears belittled. Several interviews refer to how little consideration is given to this part of management that should be crucial because of its closeness to everyday operations in the company's decision-making process. " *In our Comex meetings, I would also want to see more consideration given to what my manager says*" (interview 04). As a result, it appears that this process causes middle management to lose its function as a link between top management and operations. This compromises the transmission of values and strategic choices. As a consequence, the transfer of interest and involvement appears to have been problematic as a result of this gap in the corporate leadership hierarchy. "*It appeared as though the challenge was only being experienced as a step, a small assignment, rather than as an independent experience.*" (interview 03). This ultimately weakens efforts to finish the process. This lack of clarity in the leadership structure is evident when the interviews refer to an "*absence of clarity in terms of the perimeter of action between the staff leader and the associated of reference that leads to not being clear about the boundaries of the role and the work - How far do I go? Where do I stop?*" (interview 01).

The interviews, then, reveal a strong disconnection between the definition and promotion of the new values and the concrete implementation of these in the day-to-day. "*The purpose of NOS*

[4] NOS executive committee

is very good. [...] But then, in fact, you look at profit, you look at business" (interview 10). Many interviewees emphasize the "*theme of consistency between what one makes, what one says, and then how he/she behaves in everyday reality*" (interview 04). And in many instances, it seems that there still is this difficulty. "*There is sometimes a bit of detachment from what the promoted values are and how they are reflected in the day-to-day operations*" (interview 02). Once more, the feeling is that while we may have discovered a beautiful slogan, its application to internal processes and the real world is lacking. Indeed, the interviews provide a picture of an internal climate where the ideals outlined in the new statement do not appear to be completely embraced and honoured. "*A concrete example: they talk about 'respectful partnership,' but I happened to get an email in the evening at 11 p.m. saying 'I want by tomorrow morning slides.' I don't find it respectful*" (interview 01). Again, one interviewee points out: " *I actually saw it* (*cancelling the only financial contributions that were there for international students from emerging countries) in contradiction with what they were telling us*" (interview 11). According to the data, there is a disparity between how purpose is handled in workshops and in daily life. "*When you do this training, [...] you create the wonderful atmosphere, in the sense that you are real [...] You close the door, a week goes by, and you come back ... (to normality) [...] more consistency is needed in what we do in the day-to-day and a little bit of reinforcement*" (interview 10). The perception is that many issues often remain, for some reason, confined to the hours and environment of the workshop without being properly transposed to the day-to-day work. "*Some things stayed there in those four hours of the course. For example, the issue of a more extended team […] When you look at NOS in its totality there is this difficulty: to go and relate to colleagues who are from other areas... and we talked a lot about that in the Brain & Effort courses and it is something that stayed there*" (interview 11). The absence of this bridge between the workshop and the work environment seems to lead the effort required at the group level back to one that is increasingly individual "*there is, in my opinion, still not complete clarity and transparency [...] let's say that you go more in an individual way*" (interview 01). But not only that. The interviews again refer to a problem of disillusionment from those involved in the process because "*I would then close each time by going back into reality and then not finding feedback. At some point, I would be triggered by a sense of loss of innocence*" (interview 04). A disillusionment that in some cases can lead to resignation towards a process that, although well received, does not appear capable of disrupting the status quo. According to one interviewee, "*you also have to be realistic; I don't see that [...] I see great attention, great rigor, great sense of responsibility and I see that it is always more important how you do things rather than simply doing it and not doing it. I see that. Then the total synergy will never be there*" (interview 14). Here again, an internal environment issue emerges that is non-promoting values in everyday life. This leads the individual employee to make individual effort whose results are not perceived.

Finally, from the evidence, it can be analysed how in the recent period the work environment is perceived as overwhelming and stressful by employees. "*So many things to be done, so many demands, very little time to do them. The demand is increasing and there is an overwhelmed that I feel is constant*" (interview 09). It is unclear whether to attribute this trend to the post-covid recovery, the rift given by the new presidency, or a mixture of the two. However, in conjunction with the promoted business transformation, there is a perceived sharp increase in the volume of work, often in a haphazard way. "*There is a multiplication in terms of numbers of the products we offer, corresponding on the one hand to a reorganization of roles. We try to redistribute more equitably and differently, finding new ways of working, but at a certain point the blanket is short*" (interview 02) and it turns out that "*the effort we had to put into the work was such that it shifted the focus away from values*" (interview 02) and the embedding purpose process in place. Employees say they "*found themselves in a period where schedules increased absurdly [...] (this) created many operational activities to manage that didn't give you time to* *even wonder who you were*" (interview 12). In this passage, then, the temporality issue also emerges. The interviews highlight how this increase in work activity has gone hand in hand with increasingly less efficient time management, highlighting a problem of time constraints. This is detrimental to the success of the embedding purpose process because "*there is so much potential but (there is also) little time and clearly not wanting to devote it only to work*" (interview 09). The negative impact of time-work management becomes clear when it comes to "*an issue of planning, of wanting to do so much and right away, when in fact the time resource, in particular, is the scarce one and those times when you set the goal of doing everything necessarily comes at the expense of quality as well. It becomes something mechanical, something mandatory.*" (interview 01). In addition, the interviews show that this deficient time management from the company is accompanied by an erroneous assessment of priorities. Indeed, the theme of temporality is often associated in the interviews with a theme of lack of priorities, which results in employees' perceptions of greater confusion regarding the direction to be taken, the values they want to pass at the purpose level, and the real importance the company seems to give them. The problem appears to be one of wanting to do as much as possible, without defining a clear prioritization of the activities to be done. However, "*the moment you want to do everything, the issue of dispersion of energies arises, but more importantly of focus, [...] if everything is prioritized it means that nothing is prioritized. [...] there is this important stumbling block of theory-practice, values that are still not put into practice because there are somewhat different pushes*" (interview 01). This circumstance is similar to the first law of dynamics. If forces of the same strength are applied to a body from several directions, it will remain in place. The sum of these forces will be zero instead. The same is true for workers who must manage several tasks at once and are unable to successfully complete any of them. For respondents, this overwhelming environment is harmful, especially for the rooting of the new purpose. "*Often there is also the risk that one misses the information* *and especially that one runs so much after the detail, the things, the activities that in the end misses the picture. The purpose.*" (interview 11). The effort required for the process to bear fruit is likely to be in vain if one does not "*have time to appreciate them (the values) because you don't see them around. [...] Because you're in a negative frame of mind, because objectively we were overloaded, and mistakes were rightly being made*" (interview 12).

Due to the fact that it needs the individuals who should be its supporters to exert effort that they do not see as being rewarded, the internal environment appears to prevent the adoption of the new ideals.

4.3.3 Tensions related to process nature

Finally, on field results reveal one more intriguing tension inside the process, which has boundaries in the operational area. First of all, difficulties emerge in being able to properly assess the progress of the ongoing process of purpose embedding. Externally, it also appears difficult to have confirmation of the change undertaken, because there often are relationships unchanged in their negotiation structure. "*Most of our Chinese partners tend to create a very trusting relationship with the person they are talking to [...] They are people who have been talking to my boss and me for a long time and they don't perceive that difference so much*" (interview 09). But even internally, it is complex to measure any progress. Indeed, based on a transformation of cultural and value matrix, it is complicated to find a method of assessing progress given the absence of quantitative and evenly scattered results over time. "*Clearly it cannot be a change that happens overnight. An organization has defined processes, it involves so many people [...] I feel that [...] in our operations we are moving toward decisions that lead us to be able to be more easily consistent with purpose*" (interview 13). As mentioned earlier, it is challenging to have a clear opposition to social standards that cannot be directly measured against objective values. "*Much more complex is the next step which is to go from these high statements to putting them into practice [...] And that's where I think we are playing the gradualism card well"* (interview 08). Purpose is based on values that are highly shareable, but hardly quantifiable in visible results. So, there is a lack of direct contrast but also high cognitive inertia to be broken. For these reasons, the interviews frequently make reference to the themes of gradualism and expectancy for the outcomes of the embedding purpose process. After all, the process started less than two years ago with kick-offs that began a few months ago. *"We must have the patience to wait, to keep the bar straight on this transformation because the results and the transformation are yet to come*" (interview 08). "*Changing culture is not something on/off, it's not like turning on the light.*" (interview 14). Interviewees also emphasize how the structure of a business school's operations, such as NOS, needs time to make assessments. A business school lives on annual courses, on programs that will have tangible results only after six, twelve, twenty-four months, and "*the first programs that reflect this vision change, that put purpose at the centre, have just been launched*" (interview 13). The interviews, then, highlight the necessity for balance in order for the new purpose to succeed without being overemphasized or undervalued. *"There is a fairly significant trade-off between the need to quickly interpret the needs of the market and the imperative to "start applying it somewhere because if I don't, if I wait to redesign it all at once, I risk it will never be realized. The risk is to downplay it too much or give it too much emphasis.*" (interview 03). There should be a trade-off between implementing purpose 100 percent in all one's activities and not implementing it at all. One should, according to the evidence, first wait and understand the internal results and market needs, and then implement the process gradually. Also, at the external image level it is necessary to promote "*upcoming initiatives such as revising precisely our tone of voice, so the way we present ourselves externally, but also to get these messages across*" (interview 13) to avoid suffering from identity gaps both internally and externally.

In other words, Rome was not built in a day, purpose either.

4.4 Process Enablers

Various internal corporate components that either directly or indirectly assisted in the process of absorbing the new purpose are shown by the analysis of the interviews. In fact, the qualitative data analysis reveals two key types of process enablers.

What appears from the evidence is that NOS was able to build over time an internal culture capable of giving awareness to the change. This cultural readiness for the transition, combined with a clear and shared idea of what needed to be changed, seems to have facilitated the process of embedding purpose.

4.4.1 Presence of factors capable of facilitating cultural change readiness

"*NOS already had a sense of needing or wanting to change. They were prepared to exploit their business school's full potential as a constructive, regenerating force."* (interview 06). As is clear from the words of Vitana's top management and an Askelia employee involved in the re-branding process, *"(for NOS) it was very clear who they wanted to be in the future and why they existed*" (interview 05). In interviews, especially with partners outside the school, this clear and shared vision of the company's future is often referred to. It appears that NOS had already adopted a distinctive trajectory with its initiatives, with a strong emphasis on school social responsibility. The choice, for example, to embark on the path to become a B-corp emerges as a facilitator of awareness. NOS in this way "*equips itself with the tools it needs to be able to* *have an ever-positive, ever-better impact*" (interview 06) towards its internal and external network of stakeholders and society more generally.

The strong direction toward the future positioning of the company is certainly one of the factors that the interviews emphasized as peculiar to the last presidency of the business school. "*The permission field is one of the topics of purpose in general. Elio (Baresi), in my perspective, invented it. Indeed, you may go there and say anything at all with Elio. From this point of view, he is quite forthcoming and will tell you anything.*" (interview 10). Therefore, the decision of the school to make this change seems to be well-suited to the times we live in and compatible with what a business school should promote. According to one NOS employee, restructuring the company around a well-defined and social purpose "*is an ambitious goal, but also consistent with the times we are living in. I mean, the fact that it happened at the turn of a pandemic also gives us pause, in the sense that it's something that so many beyond our school are reflecting on. The fact that we've become a B-corp, the fact that we still want to go beyond just profit, but make it sustainable and inclusive goes very much in line with the messages that we've been facing*" (interview 13). In other words, a shift that appears to have been preceded by significant work on the side of senior management, based on the interviews. Work that can convey the company's social commitment and let the broader NOS ecosystem see the purpose clearly.

4.4.2 Evidence of internal cognition regarding the need to shift gears

The study of the interviews reveals that NOS, and particularly its management, had a clear knowledge of the need for corporate transformation in addition to supporting a culture suitable for change. A change emerges to be especially referable to a structure of image and positioning vis-à-vis the network of stakeholders to which it belongs. From the evidence, it is clear that NOS, as an international business school, suffers a lack of appeal to researchers and faculty with whom to collaborate. An interview conducted with an internal employee reveals how "*it* *seems more difficult to say to a person, 'Come and do this thing at NOS.' Whereas, going back to the early periods, we had people that would line up for it*" (interview 08). NOS seems to have lost that lustre on external actors who were previously more interested in participating in NOS initiatives. A lack of attraction that is harmful and whose cause seems to be related to a discord between NOS's image as an independent business school and the university environment of Paideia with its rich network. Thus, there is a lack of image adherence between what it wants to be - a business school linked to a globally recognized university education - and the independence historically sought by Paideia. This condition appears to be understood by all levels of NOS and flows into a strong push for change. One example that emerges from the qualitative data is related to the rebranding decided by the business school. Indeed, from the words of a partner belonging to Interbrand, summarizing her contact with the different levels of NOS, for the rebranding process "*the first thing that came out from this community was 'we don't know what NOS means. We don't know what it stands for.' [...] You need to have a meaning behind the experience, the identity and the name because, otherwise, it is just some random name that people just say. But they don't understand what the connection is*" (interview 05). The issue that then arises from the interviews concerning this circumstance is: how is it feasible to make the brand name appealing to customers if even the NOS individuals themselves do not identify a value in it?

But precisely because of this, the evidence underscores how the shared awareness of this problem has driven NOS toward a targeted and effective rebranding action. A consciousness that also transposes directly to the perceived need to change direction at the organizational and internal structural level. President Domenico Giordano's words sum up this awareness and consciousness. According to him, the NOS that he and dean Elio Baresi inherited was "*an organization that I had perfect consciousness that - I say this somewhat brutally - was too artisanal to run a business school that was approaching 30 million in revenue*" (interview 07).

NOS needed a reform that could evolve "*a typical small business management, where the processes were somewhat limited and also the quality of professionalism was quite inferior to what such a size demanded*" (interview 07).

Therefore, it is evident from the research that this knowledge and the shared clarity of the NOS environment's aspirations for who and what it wanted to be are two key elements in aiding the purpose embedding process examined.

4.5 Process Outcomes

The final macro-theme that emerges from the analysis of the interviews is about the outcomes of the embedding process purpose. Interviewees exhibit three areas of process outcomes at the corporate and individual levels, both personally and professionally. Not only is there a new inclination to look at the company level beyond mere profit, seeking a strong social connotation, but the company itself shows benefit from the new drive and tools harnessed during the process. Similarly, these tools are not only leveraged as a source of professional alignment and improvement, but are often leveraged by the employees themselves as useful tools in their own daily personal life.

4.5.1 Higher attention over mere profit

First, by focusing on the work done with Brain & Effort and, more generally, the broader transformation process, the data gained from the interviews seem to emphasize the significance of looking beyond the business's financial component. The new Paideia NOS GSoM, and therefore its staff, appear to have gained fresh clarity and a stronger sense of putting the emphasis beyond financial gain through the process of embedding purpose. An emphasis that may have been present before but that the work done over the past two years surrendered clearer and more effective. The path taken to accompany the process under analysis is found to be critical, as described by some interviews, "*I found in the path taken, both the initial definition of purpose, but also the accompanying process, great value in showing what were the things to pay attention to. And it may be that some of the aspects that now emerge as visible, are visible precisely because of this extra attention being paid to certain facts that instead, having less attention before, seemed less relevant*" (interview 08). Going deeper with this specific interviewee, it emerges how the new focus and centrality of purpose issues do not impact in a revolutionary way the image and culture existing within the company. Instead, it served and still serves to clarify and give a clearer and deeper meaning to which values were already existing within the business school. "*It is not about denying what you are capable of doing, what represents your core, but giving it a different meaning. [...] Especially from the perspective of the person who gets it, not just from the perspective of the person who sells it*" (interview 08). "*Now there are different things that one has to pay attention to. New-guidelines to follow or even just the messages to take to the outside world.*" (interview 09). In short, the process seems to have brought that "*increased sensitivity to certain issues*" (interview 08) that, according to today's latest research, is critical to properly and effectively positioning the company in the eyes of its network of stakeholders, carving out the right social role and purpose for itself.

The heightened focus on social and relational issues, which purpose seems to have defined, does not, however, turn out to be just an ephemeral cultural and image stance. The impact of this focus and the purpose embedding process also turns out to be present in the business approach of NOS's new course. In interviews, reference is made, for example, to the change in performance measurement introduced during this transformation. Referring to the three pillars in the new purpose, "*we will put them in our performance scorecard. [...] a way to translate* *each value with behaviours and attitudes and have three/four times a year discussion on that. This will help to understand what the 'passionate innovator' is, what the 'respect for partner' is, and then possibly get insights from people who have received that training*" (interview 14). A second interview then points out how the transformation leads to a new push and search for transversality and contamination of various projects: "*There are several cross-cutting projects that we have been given. We now have the option of including initiatives that are a little bit broader into our job*." (interview 02). Transversality appears to be a sign of new vision that is more inclusive and has a broader emphasis than the previously purely retributive one.

4.5.2 Advantages that the tools used in the process provided to employees' personal lives

On a personal level, interviewees emphasize that the process and tools used (e.g., the ones given by Brain & Effort) are very helpful because they "*allowed us to put into practice what at the beginning [...] were not very tangible words. So, the purpose, values, etc.*" (interview 13). In a sense, the evidence confirmed the goodness of the work done with external partners and the need to implement specific work to go in and facilitate the anthem-text of a new reinforced corporate culture built on purpose.

But the findings also highlight an especially intriguing element. In particular, they place a greater emphasis on non-purely professional factors. Throughout a number of interviews, case studies of private and intimate circumstances are discussed. In managing these situations, the tools provided by the organization are quite successful. "*With my children, it happened to me sometimes, for example, to try the baseball conversation model*[5] *to calm my older son's pathologies, ... I perceived the fact that it is an important tool to have in one's baggage*" (interview 03). "*In my role, I tend to [...] open the door and ... problem, conflict, something*

[5] Tool provided by Brain & Effort during workshops with NOS employees

wrong. So, I used to approach things in a way that often get me irritated. Instead, the baseball conversation model, where the first step is really 'understand your world', [...] always set the purpose of a conversation" (interview 14). "*I also experienced it personally with a moment of growing and increasing my abilities or skills on dealing with certain topics or dealing with certain situations*" (interview 08).

This aspect of practicality in the personal sphere emerges from the analysis and reinforces the view of the embedding purpose process not only as a useful transformation for the company but also, and more importantly, as a personal empowerment of employees. The gain, if it can be so defined, is extracted from the mere professional context and goes into the everyday life and interpersonal relationships that people may have. "*In the day-to-day, in my opinion, it became, after an initial moment when obviously we were all on the same page, more of a personal thing*" (interview 13).

4.5.3 Benefits that the new purpose is bringing to the organization

Employee personal benefits resulting from the purpose embedding process in analysis have a direct and indirect influence on their professional lives and the ensuing business outcomes for NOS. Several times, from the evidence, there is a reference to a "*common language that we acquired. [...] in the sense that we have a shared basis*" (interview 13). This defines a different sphere of process outcomes: the building or strengthening of factors that improve the professional aspect of employees and by extension the company.

First, the analysis shows a positive impact on the working environment. The working environment is perceived by respondents as positive and open-minded. An environment in which bonds between colleagues and across teams are stronger and more purposeful toward work and goals. "*You breathe the spread of culture afterward, because all the teams were a little bit more open-minded. So, in some ways, they were all more proactive*" (interview 12).

The Brain & Effort workshops and the tools necessary to allow company’s change appear to have sparked a new spirit at work, increased trust among the co-workers, and most crucially, increased decision-making responsibility. "*The energy effect is generated and stays with you for a while. And I think it has this regenerative role. So, every once in a while, you need it to give you that boost back there, it puts gas back in the engine, gives you again value to the activity*" (interview 08). "*One thing we have been working on a lot is respecting the autonomy in the work of colleagues [...] to trust what they are doing, not to expect colleagues to respond right away [...] now I have to say that at least I feel more autonomous in the work*” (interview 11). “*We were left, in my opinion, more space to propose new ideas, propose new solutions [...] I perceived a strong appreciation from our managers when a solution was brought to the table by us*" (interview 02). In short, a new tendency emerges from the interviews, both at the personal and leadership levels, to favour the decision-making and reasoning of the individual. It is often emphasized that through Brain & Effort a newfound free space for error has now been established to foster what today's literature calls corporate intrapreneurship. "*For example, my manager actually told me: 'we can all make a mistake and a solution is found. This should not block you', this is a very strong message, in my opinion, to give to those who work in your team*" (interview 02). The professional environment that is perceptible from the interviews appears to place a high value on respect for each individual's work and their ability to contribute, not only in terms of the company's financial goals but also, and perhaps more importantly, in terms of the company's ultimate social goals. "*Respect for diversity and trying as much as possible to promote equality. These are issues that are reflected so much in the day-to-day*" (interview 02).

Values and direction realignment and consciousness are other crucial developments in this realm of self-interest. The evidence clearly shows that the efforts made to facilitate purpose embedding along the different levels of the corporate organizational chart have resulted in a strong awareness of what the founding principles of the NOS company are and should be. In this sense, it is interesting to note that some interviewees point out how the work done has been most useful in making concrete and tangible the culture and values, which were previously only felt superficially and vaguely. "*To give an example the push for innovation has always been there, it has been one of the main characteristics of NOS. In my experience, in this organization, (the purpose embedding process) it has made it all clearer on the one hand, and on the other hand more concrete, [...] The previous purpose was too lofty, seen as being intangible, and lacking in concreteness.*" (interview 01).

Moreover, the evidence points out how this new awareness is crucial for the company itself, too. NOS emerges transformed and with a pool of employees demonstrating a reborn drive for direct involvement in the company's strategic organizational issues. With this in mind, space is left for a new range of solutions born out of a concrete and real drive within the company. A drive that the company itself seems to want strongly to promote through the transformation undertaken. "*The initial impression was a more direct engagement in the development of the new strategy, which changed the original purpose and improved the focus on the NOS's core values*." (interview 01).

Discussion

5.1 Theorizing the model

Analysing the evidence from the interviews and described in the previous chapter, an attempt is made to construct a model that can describe the process studied and the mechanisms that characterized it.

In summarizing the data, five macro-themes that represent the embedding purpose process promoted by NOS are discovered

1. Past evolution and starting context
2. Mechanisms of embedding purpose
3. Tensions generated in the process
4. Process enablers
5. Process outcomes

Initially, a linear model of the process is developed. Through "mechanisms of embedding purpose", the model serves as a sort of longitudinal link between "past evolution and starting context" and "process outcomes". In reality, the proposed model is slightly more complex since it also takes into consideration a different level than just the development and progress of transformation: process enablers and tensions.

In the model - shown in Figure 3 – there is the linear advancement (blue arrow) of transformation that starts from a very specific cultural and environmental condition within the company and ends with the achievement of certain outcomes, thanks to mechanisms defined and exploited by the company. However, the purpose embedding process studied has deeper implications due to tensions and enablers developed meanwhile.

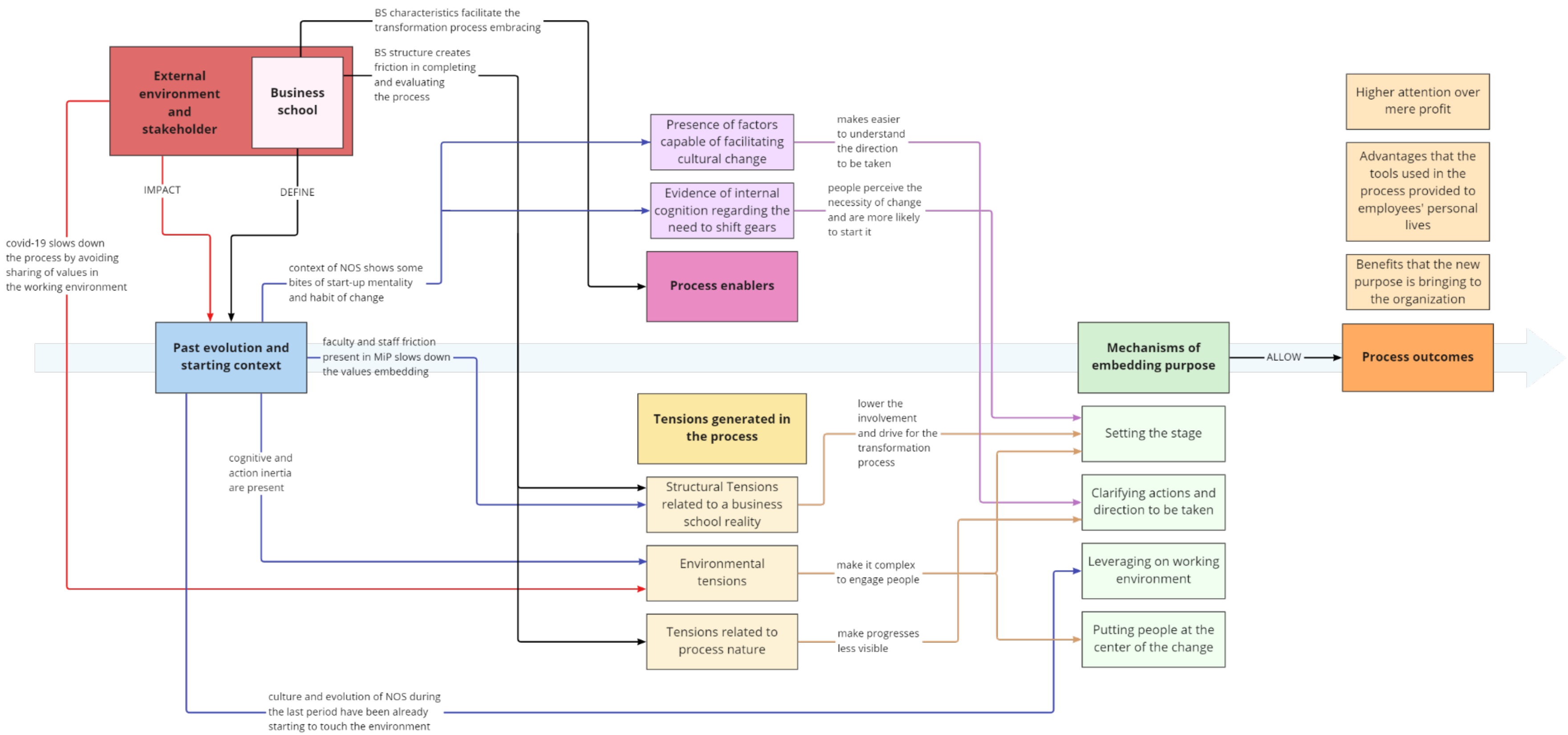


Figure 3. Model of the embedding process

The business school (NOS) and the environment in which it operates must both be represented in the model since these two realities' unique traits have a direct influence on the purpose embedding process. In fact, both the business school and the external environment have defined and shaped what has been called as the 'past evolution and starting context'. In addition, NOS, its internal and external environments, and the cultural and environmental circumstances in place at the start of the transformation are the sources of a variety of tensions and process enablers that may have, respectively, hindered and aided the process. For example, the conflict between faculty and staff and the cyclic nature of operations and programs are two characteristics of the business school and NOS that led to the formation of both institutional and operational tensions. The distancing associated with the COVID-19 epidemic and the cultural inertia existing within NOS are two environmental factors, the former external and the latter internal, that have created difficulties in the process. On the other hand, the propensity for change and the recognition of the need for change exhibited by the NOS are instrumental in facilitating cultural readiness and making the whole environment digest change more easily.

Obviously, the model links the initial conditions to the purpose embedding mechanisms defined and put into practice by the NOS leadership. In more detail, the model also shows how process enablers and tensions generated impacted these mechanisms, which ultimately enabled the achievement of the outcomes analysed. For example, structural and environmental tensions make it more difficult to clarify the direction to be taken and put in place all those processes necessary for setting the stage. In contrast to this disruptive action, one can then observe how the 'process enablers' analysed are crucial in facilitating these two mechanisms making the process smoother and more effective.

The mechanism related to the work environment, however, turns out to be a direct result of a process that was already observable in the NOS, as evidenced by an increasing emphasis on the work environment as a facilitator of strategic change. Overall, it is important to note this although the "mechanisms of embedding purpose" are, for the most part, impacted by the tensions and enablers generated.

5.2 Implication for theory

The research conducted is part of a strand of studies around strategic implications that has been growing in recent years. The study seeks to qualitatively analyse the concept of purpose once it is strategically embedded in the context of a business school, such as NOS. Therefore, the work done has the promise of being generative of further research on these issues by prioritizing future quantitative feedback. The single qualitative case study carried out aims to describe how purpose can be implemented in a business school and what mechanisms and tensions NOS has concretely faced in order to embed purpose within the internal levels of the organization.

The studies published to date have favoured a greater focus on what the effects of defining a coherent purpose within the life of a business can be. This has led to an increase interest in the notion of a top-down purpose as a strategic tool that can be established and pushed to pervade all levels of an organization by its management. This study tries to be a first attempt to delve into the institutionalization of purpose within a company, describing what may be the mechanisms and conflicts that emerge in the process of embedding purpose. The analysis reveals a perspective that, in some respects, differs from what has been previously found in the literature. Indeed, management scholars advocate a linear and very straightforward understanding of the idea of organizational purpose in every article examined. The study conducted on NOS breaks away from theory and adds something new. In fact, it is observed that merely writing statements - which ought to be an expression of purpose - is insufficient. In truth, not everyone will be able to grasp them, and it's much more crucial to implement what may seem to be only charming phrases. Now, it is possible to comprehend how purpose is nuanced, articulated, and susceptible to a variety of conflicts in its actualization because this is one of the first studies of a real transformation process centred on it. In fact, the preceding section looked at the tensions that purpose implementation causes inside the firm. Tensions that are not mentioned in the literature. In particular, the analysis shows how the embracing of the values that a company strategically chooses to emphasize as its own is not a linear and immediate process. The process of embedding purpose undertaken by the NOS turns out to be more complex, fraught with conflict and with the need to align the actors involved in the transformation with the direction taken. The need for individual work, by the individual employee, and organizational work, by the company, occur to be crucial in the process under analysis. As a result, purpose cannot be addressed superficially since it might become a double-edged sword when it is truly transferred to the various levels of the organization. The idea that a company can implement a purpose-centred transformation effectively, quickly and easily is refuted by the analysis conducted. Any company that chooses to put such a transformative process into action must be aware that embedding purpose calls for a serious and committed effort at the corporate and individual levels. Without going through this process, the firm cannot benefit from the positive effects on its image and economic return that the defining of a consistent and clear purpose may have. The process of embedding purpose hides behind its benefits. Indeed, it can bring a mask of complexity and tensions that can not only make the transformative process futile, but also risk going to undermine the stability of the business environment. A shallow approach to purpose-centred transformation runs the danger of creating a significant mismatch between the company's previous image and the new course adopted, which might have negative effects on both internal and external identity gaps as well as the possibility of poor employee engagement.

Moreover, the analysis carried out describes an ongoing process. NOS, or rather the new Paideia NOS GSoM, has been undertaking this change for only two years and to date the process cannot be said to be complete. The analysis revealed that although the change has been made at the management and strategic levels, the process of assimilation and transmission of the purpose at the various levels of the organizational chart is still in progress. The research conducted therefore analyses a dynamic process of embedding purpose. This is particularly intriguing. Indeed, when studying a dynamic process, you are able to grasp a number of mechanisms and tensions that emerge during the processual development but that a static analysis, carried out after the process is complete, tends to hide and underestimate because they have little impact on the outcomes obtained. The analysis conducted highlights a number of tensions and process enablers that have emerged and are emerging during the process and are going to impact positively or negatively on the success of the outcome. These tensions and enablers are critical for their impact on the embedding purpose mechanisms implemented by the NOS, at least at this stage. But this does not rule out the potential that in the next time a specific tension could manifest itself and obstruct the process, or that the context will provide a facilitator potent enough to speed up the transition. In such a case, the risk of an ecstatic posthumous analysis is to fossilize one's attention on these two possible aspects while forgetting the importance of the tensions and facilitators that this study analysed at this stage. While it is obvious that the research must be confirmed once the current process is over, in the event of a single case study (such as the one being examined), a dynamic analysis like the one carried out is essential. With a view to future generalization of the model, going to analyse a greater range of tensions and facilitators to the mechanisms of transformation is crucial since different realities and contexts may prefer certain mechanisms over others. But a proper modelling analysis of the process must take into account all the variables that characterize it, and that a dynamic analysis such as the one carried out is able to not underestimate.

5.3 Implications for practice

The research carried out on the purpose embedding process that took place at NOS has institutional implications in addition to management ones. First, what may be inferred from the study is that it addresses a large network of stakeholders who have an interest in the company, such as experts, consulting companies, or other stakeholders. These implications may not simply apply to the business itself. Indeed, the purpose embedding process examined incorporates a variety of players and is not limited to considering only managers. For this reason, there also are implications for practice. In this regard, interviews are conducted with a variety of staff members and employees at various rungs of the organizational ladder. Additionally, evidence frequently refers to NOS relationships with third parties, such partners or clients. Therefore, how this internal process of change affects these external relays is investigated in this work. It is clearly evident that the process is ongoing, but time constraints prevent this from showing up outside of the process. For instance, this is made clear by interviews, according to which NOS external partners seem not to perceive much of a difference within the business school. Therefore, it is intriguing to comprehend how and why this occurs. Since NOS is a business school that is delivering with courses that are offered at least once a year, the question of temporality is crucial to the implementation of change. And as a result, it is essential to take internal changes into account and analyse them over a long-time horizon in order to receive external feedback as well.

The investigation, which focuses on a process that has already started and is in progress, succeeds in highlighting not only the positive outcomes at the operational level, but also the major challenges and obstacles that had to be overcome. This enables to establish rules that should be followed when putting comparable procedures into practice. In particular, it is now evident from the interviews that an open and flexible organizational culture is necessary to begin a purpose-focused strategic transformation journey, in order to effectively accommodate change. Furthermore, culture must be centred on the people who are the true change-agents. In order to successfully and clearly convey change, business leaders must also be able to foresee and head off potential implementation issues. Managers, for instance, must first and foremost establish the necessary priorities during the transition process and guarantee good business operation during this turbulent time. This may be summed up by the concept of ambidexterity, which refers to an organization's capacity to capitalize on its current business while concurrently pursuing new opportunities, including those for change. In the absence of a clear and planned organization of change, one runs the danger of getting drawn into the transformation process without fully knowing what is occurring or why it is happening. Through, therefore, gradualism and appropriate planning, it is possible to succeed in day-by-day application of the high statements that embody the company's purpose. Employees are eventually able to operationally implement the values that the purpose embedding process is founded on thanks to an ongoing internal (leaders) or external (external firms like Brain & Effort) support.

Potential tensions may be pre-emptively reduced using the model derived from this study. For instance, the utilization of the tools given by Brain & Effort is one problem raised in the interviews. Although intended for practical use in the workplace, these tools are solely used by the employees on a personal basis. Therefore, it's essential to complement their utilization with brand-new tools that encourage teamwork or their everyday application in the workplace. Therefore, it is recommended that consulting companies, or those involved in organizational change, come up with new tools or workshops that consider how to incorporate the guiding principles of purpose into operational practice.

The research also has, for the first time, a practical application in the definition of the potential benefits of the embedding purpose process. In particular, social and economic advantages are noted. Regarding social benefits, the case study emphasizes a stronger feeling of interdisciplinarity and community that was previously lacking inside the business school. Data analysis reveals a new culture of sharing and openness toward co-workers. Additionally, there is more awareness of specific issues and focus on the image the company has on the outside. There also appear to have been the biggest accomplishments from a personal perspective. Employees, in fact, grow personally throughout the strategic transformation process, bringing with them tools and insights that they apply more in their personal lives. Therefore, the limitation is to comprehend how to broaden the application of these teachings, as previously indicated, to the professional domain. From an economic viewpoint, it is clear how improved workplace conditions may benefit organizational and business outcomes. Better individual performance results from closer, more honest relationships with co-workers and a shared language, which ultimately improves organizational performance. Therefore, the process of embedding purpose has the potential to create fresh momentum provided that it is performed correctly and in a setting that is flexible and open to change. However, the biggest drawback of this study is that it deals with an evolving process. There is consequently the need to comprehend how to sustain over time this collaborative attitude and energy that the embedding purpose procedure sparks.

In conclusion, purpose is frequently trivialized in the way through which is theorized, but a different, more fair perspective is shown by looking at a direct application of it. In reality, to truly understand the purpose of an organization, one must look beyond the idealistic perspective and evaluate the difficulties and imperatives that organizational leadership must take into account. Purpose must now be institutionalized through the aforementioned methods since it can no longer be considered as the solution to every issue that an organization face.

5.4 Limitations and future research implications

The field of management science is relatively new when it comes to the topic of organizational purpose. This body of literature does not currently consider the practical issues of purpose beyond its theoretical analysis. Through the research conducted on NOS, the aim is to examine a real, purpose-driven process of strategic change that occurred within a business school. This work has produced a theoretical model that can serve as a roadmap for similar processes. However, this model is applicable to the environment from which it was derived. This is really one of the study's limitations because it cannot be applied to other contexts. Though, it may be possible to extract certain notions and methods (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) that can still be generalizable. Anyway, this opens the door to further investigation into the top-down deployment of such a model, to understand how its features may be similar to or different in other realities. Indeed, because this study is a single-case study, we lack a benchmark by which to compare how the model extracted may differ or be comparable in other circumstances or in other business schools. Therefore, it will be left to future researchers to determine the circumstances to which this theory may be applied.

Another significant limitation in the study is that the embedding purpose process studied is still in progress. This leads to not have the opportunity to have a complete view and analyse the evolution of the business school ex post. This makes it possible for future research to outline a comprehensive procedure, uncover new elements to include in the model, or alter its core. Furthermore, because the process is ongoing, it is difficult to identify what the potential organizational performance results may be. According to the model, increased individual performance results in increased corporate performance because of the momentum created by the change. However, in this regard, there is currently no long-term empirical data that may support or validate such hypotheses over the long run. There is currently no concrete evidence to support the literature premise that a common goal might increase trust, which in turn improves performance (see, for example, Bachmann and Zaheer 2008; Edmondson 1999, 2014, Henderson 2021). Thus, it is essential that future management researchers look at this field of study.

In addition, the study adopts a qualitative methodology, thus it comes with all the drawbacks mentioned and addressed previously. As a result, the model cannot be generalized since it is based on empirical data that cannot be objectified because they are gathered by researchers who are directly involved in the context of study. In this regard, there is a lack of quantitative research in the literature and, more importantly, of performance assessment tools that may gauge how well purpose values are being adopted in the context of organizations. The only study that describes the fundamental mechanisms of meaningfulness and explains how people discover meaning via work is that of Aguinis and Glavas (2019). However, potential directions for future study may concentrate on how the phenomena of purpose embedding might be examined quantitatively by developing a performance measurement system based on suitable indicators. Yet, there is also the need to know how employees perceive these metrics for gauging operational adherence to purpose and if they serve as incentives or deterrents. Indeed, simple indicators frequently don't provide any meaningful practical input; instead, they may simply be utilized by the organization to demonstrate to the outside world that it is purposeful. For this reasons, multi-discipline research should focus on these issues.

Finally, further future research may focus on whether having a high level of social capital and therefore trust amongst people is required for the purpose embedding process to go smoothly and efficiently. Another open research area is also to comprehend how the idea of organizational purpose could change as a result of its real-world implementations. In conclusion, management scholars should address these unresolved issues using this work as a starting point to make progress.

Conclusions

The model presented is inherently linked to the evidence extrapolated from the interviews conducted and the specific case. However, it is intended to be a starting point for an increasingly in-depth analysis of corporate purpose. A literary strand that research, conducted in recent years, is proving to be fundamental in breaking down the inertia associated with "shareholder supremacy," defining a clear social role for companies within their network of stakeholders. A literary strand, however, that this analysis has attempted to dissect in its mechanisms, shedding light on a process far more complex than a simple strategic decision made at the table and lowered from above.

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Appendix

Interview #	Speaker description	Interview #	Speaker description
01	NOS, staff employee	**08**	NOS, Comex member
02	NOS, staff employee	**09**	NOS, staff employee
03	NOS, Comex member	**10**	NOS, team leader S&M
04	NOS, team leader (MBA/EMBA)	**11**	NOS, staff employee
05	Partner from Askelia	**12**	NOS, team leader (MBA/EMBA)
06	Partner from Vitana	**13**	NOS, staff employee
07	NOS, top manager	**14**	NOS, top manager

Table 2. Short description of respondents

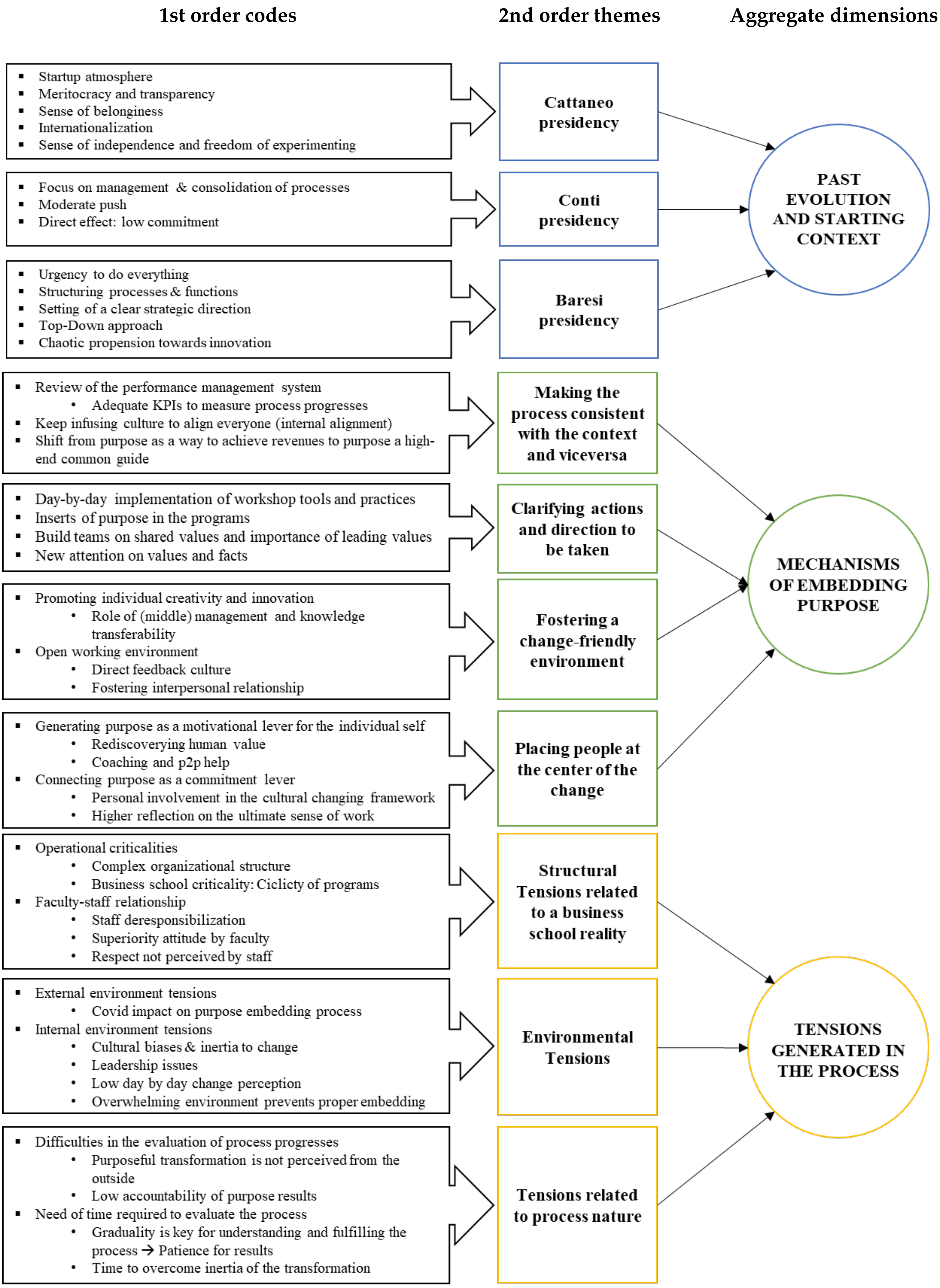

Table 3a. Coding scheme part 1

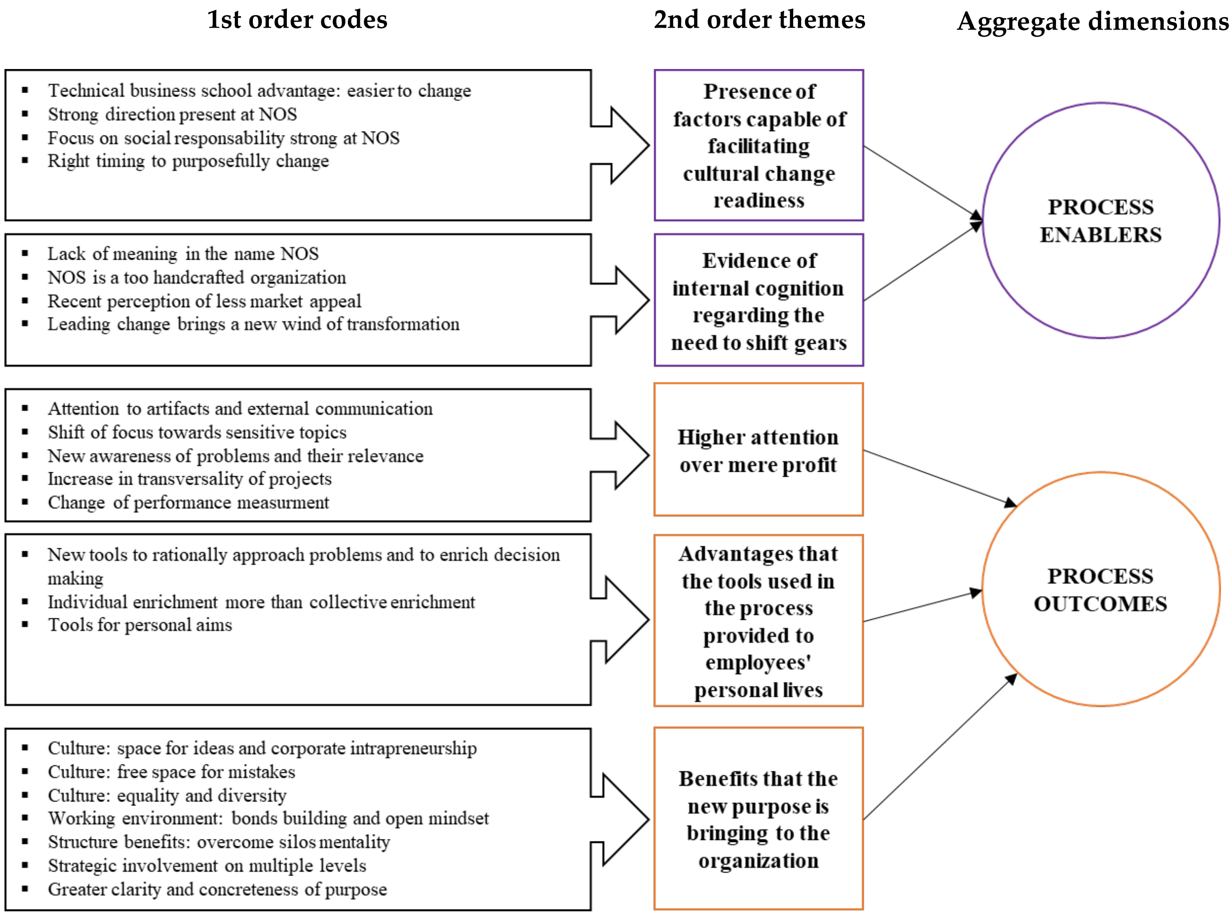

Table 3b. Coding scheme part 2

Purpose			
Definitions	**Source**	**Article**	**Theme**
"Something that is perceived as producing a social benefit over and above the tangible pecuniary payoff that is shared by the principal and the agent."	Thakor AV, Quinn RE (2013) The economics of higher purpose. ECGIFinance Working Paper 395, Olin Business School, Washington University, St. Louis	Corporate purpose and financial performance (Gartenberg et al 2019) OS	**Pro-Social**
[...] By Aristotle within his ideas regarding teleology – purpose being something that is inherent in all beings. Associated with the notion of extrinsic finality which consists of a 'being' realizing a purpose outside that 'being', for the utility and welfare of other beings	Leadership as purpose_Exploring the role of purpose in leadership practice (Kempster et al 2011) pag. 322	Leadership as purpose_Exploring the role of purpose in leadership practice (Kempster et al 2011)	**Philosophical**
*Specifically, the notion of **telos**, contributing to the good for humankind. A person will only feel fulfilled and gain a sense of well-being and purposefulness if they move towards their telos. It is the relationships that MacIntyre develops between virtues, practices, goods and telos that are critical to our understanding of the establishment of a 'good' purpose within leadership. MacIntyre conceptualizes virtues as dispositions to sustain social practices in which we participate. Virtues are acquired human qualities, the possession and exercise of which enable us to achieve what he describes as 'internal goods' as opposed to 'external goods'*	Leadership as purpose_Exploring the role of purpose in leadership practice (Kempster et al 2011) pag. 323	Leadership as purpose_Exploring the role of purpose in leadership practice (Kempster et al 2011)	**Philosophical**
Purpose should be neither mundane nor aspirational. It is not purely descriptive of what a business does – a mission statement - nor unrealistic about what it seeks to do – an aspirational vision statement to save the world. It is about solving problems, "to produce profitable solutions to the problemsof people and planet" and "not to profit from producing problems for people or planet"	Mayer, C. (2018). Prosperity: Better Business Makes the Greater Good. Oxford: Oxford University press	The Future of the Corporation and the Economics of Purpose (Colin Mayer, 2021), JMS	**Corporate Objective**
Purpose addresses fundamental ontological questions about a corporation's raison d'être, in so doing acts as a primary orientating device for corporate behaviour and business practices. It is about identifying the types of problem a corporation is trying to solve and devising profitable solutions to these problems without causing damage to people or the planet. It gives a corporation a direction while also acting as a self-regulatory mechanism.	The future of the corporation (Patriotta 2020) JMS pag 2	The future of the corporation (Patriotta 2020) JMS	**Corporate Objective**

"A concrete goal or objective for the firm that reaches beyond profit maximization."	Henderson R, Van den Steen E (2015) Why do firms have "purpose"? The firm's role as a carrier of identity and reputation. Amer. Econom. Rev. 105(5):326–330	Corporate purpose and financial performance (Gartenberg et al 2019) OS	**Corporate Objective**
"Having a purpose" or "being purposeful" usually means that firms should address "important" issues, such as climate change, environmental protection, sustainability, gender equality, minority integration, LGBTQ+ inclusion, responsible governance or employees' well-being.	An audience-based theory of firm purposefulness (Durand & Gouvard 2021) pag. 3-4	An audience-based theory of firm purposefulness (Durand & Gouvard 2021)	**Corporate Objective**
Purpose elicits the raison-d'etre of the firm that reaches beyond profit maximization. Purpose is the raison d'être of a company, embedded in a set of common beliefs that guide organizational members' actions toward long-term achievements	George, G., Haas, M.R., McGahan, A.M., Schillebeeckx, S.J.D., Tracey, P. (2022), Purpose in the For-Profit Firm: A Review and Framework for Management Research. Journal of Management; Gartenberg, C., Prat, A., & Serafeim, G. (2019). Corporate purpose and financial performance. Organization Science, 30(1), 1–18.	Legitimacy judgments and prosociality: Organizational purpose explained (Gerry George, Martine R. Haas, Havovi Joshi, Anita McGahan and Paul Tracey 2020), Chapter for "Handbook on the Business of Sustainability: The Organization, Implementation, and Practice of Sustainable Growth",	**Corporate Objective**
Purpose is not just another corporate goal that can be chosen and changed at will. As a promise, it involves moral content and deeper values and commitments that explain its engaging power	Durand, R., & Calori, R. (2006). Sameness, otherness? Enriching organizational change theories with philosophical considerations on the same and the other. Academy of Management Review, 31(1), 93–114.	Legitimacy judgments and prosociality: Organizational purpose explained (Gerry George, Martine R. Haas, Havovi Joshi, Anita McGahan and Paul Tracey 2020), Chapter for "Handbook on the Business of Sustainability: The Organization, Implementation, and Practice of Sustainable Growth",	**Corporate Objective**
Purpose is not a mere tagline or marketing campaign; it is a company's fundamental reason for being—what it does every day to create value for its stakeholders. Purpose is not the sole pursuit of profits but the animating force for achieving them	On the 2019 Business Roundtable "Statement on the Purpose of a Corporation" (Jeffrey S. Harrison, Robert A. Phillips, R. Edward Freeman 2020) JMS: pag. 2	On the 2019 Business Roundtable "Statement on the Purpose of a Corporation" (Jeffrey S. Harrison, Robert A. Phillips, R. Edward Freeman 2020) JMS	**Corporate Objective**

Goal-Based purpose: Corporate purpose can be understood as an organizational objective defined and chosen by the firm itself without necessarily recognizing the wider role of corporations in society as moral actors.	Berle, A., & Means, G. 1932. The modern corporate and private property. New York, NY: McMillian.	Purpose in the For-Profit Firm: A Review and Framework for Management Research (Gerard George, Martine R. Haas, Anita M. McGahan, Simon J. D. Schillebeeckx, Paul Tracey 2021), JMS	**Corporate Objective**
Duty-based purpose explicitly incorporates ethical and/or moral positions. This broader approach may be anchored in explicit values as well as in specific social and/or environmental duties that a firm considers to be core to its existence.	Purpose in the For-Profit Firm: A Review and Framework for Management Research (Gerard George, Martine R. Haas, Anita M. McGahan, Simon J. D. Schillebeeckx, Paul Tracey 2021), JMS	Purpose in the For-Profit Firm: A Review and Framework for Management Research (Gerard George, Martine R. Haas, Anita M. McGahan, Simon J. D. Schillebeeckx, Paul Tracey 2021), JMS; pag 5	**Corporate Objective**
"The statement of a company's moral response to its broadly defined responsibilities, not an amoral plan for exploiting commercial opportunity."	Bartlett CA, Ghoshal S (1994) Changing the role of top management: Beyond strategy to purpose. Harvard Bus. Rev. 72(6):79–88	Corporate purpose and financial performance (Gartenberg et al 2019) OS	**Corporate Objective**
"A concrete goal or objective for the firm that reaches beyond profit maximization"	Henderson R, Van den Steen E (2015) Why do firms have "purpose"? The firm's role as a carrier of identity and reputation. Amer. Econom. Rev. 105(5):326–330.	Corporate purpose and financial performance (Gartenberg et al 2019) OS	**Corporate Objective**

Table 4. Purpose definition reported on the basis of sources, articles and themes

Phrase	Second Order Themes	Aggregate Dimension
"There was a powerful driving force, especially among young people, who regarded school as a place where they could experiment and do things unrelated to training and to the strict university framework."	**(Cattaneo) Experimental Culture & Innovative Leadership**	**Past evolution and starting context**
"Through the figures of my two managers, it passed a message of greater entrepreneurship, and this is a message that I took on board very gladly."	**Fostering a change-friendly environment:** promoting individual creativity and innovation	**Mechanisms of Embedding purpose**
"This aspect of feedback culture has passed. And people have also become more confident in giving it to you, to tell you if something is wrong or if something could be done differently"	**Fostering a change-friendly environment:** Open working environment	**Mechanisms of Embedding purpose**
"There is also frequently a risk of missing information and, more importantly, of falling so far behind the operational details and activities that one finally loses sight of the big picture and the purpose."	**Internal Environment Tensions:** Overwhelming environment prevents proper embedding	**Tensions generated in the process**
"The relationship that is experienced is that of a subordinate [...] you are a classroom coordinator, 'bring me coffee, do this, do that and be my secretary'"	**Structural Tensions related to a business school reality**: Faculty-staff relationship	**Tensions generated in the process**
"The ability to build on tales and a narrative that are already there, not simply on paper, is a component of NOS that we have found to be particularly valuable."	**Presence of factors capable of facilitating cultural change readiness**	**Process Enablers**
"Error is viewed with great openness. My manager, for instance, stated that "we may all make mistakes, but eventually a solution is found. This should not block you'. Giving your team members this message is, in my opinion, highly important."	**Benefits that the new purpose is bringing to the organization**	**Process Outcomes**

Table 5. Examples of some codes analysed during the study conducted (one code per macro-theme is given)