

Research Launch

# Purpose in business

# Empowering employees and enhancing productivity



# Agenda

- Welcome
- Introduction to the project
- Now is the Time for Purpose
- Purpose-led business models, productivity and meaningful work
- Purposeful Businesses
- New ways of thinking about productivity
- Q&A & Group discussion
- Close

# Welcome



## Project and collaborators

- Purpose in business: empowering employees and enhancing productivity
- Funded by ESRC and TPI and runs from March 2024 to February 2025
- Collaborative: University of Glasgow, Scotland Productivity Forum, Prosper and Peer works as well as with our stakeholder group and the business and policy communities.
- Aim: understand key aspects of what will empower employees in different types of business to influence or drive purpose and identify how businesses can support employee-driven purpose.

# What does purpose in business mean to you?



transpiration  
leader bold  
creative  
inspiration focus fast



Prof Bridgette Wessels  
University of Glasgow  
The Productivity Institute

Introduction to the Project

# Introduction to the project

- There is growing interest from business and government in the potential of purpose in business to improve productivity. Although there are opportunities for business purpose to enhance productivity, there are, also several challenges, one of which is how to empower employees to drive purpose. Little is known about whether and how 'purpose' features in both employee and business perspectives.
- Two aspects to the challenge: (1) understand employee perspectives about purpose, what they feel would empower them to drive purpose; and (2) identify what changes business need to undertake to support employees to drive purpose.
- Central Question: In what ways can businesses and employees enact purpose to enhance productivity?

# Introduction to the project

- Subsidiary questions: In what ways can employees be empowered to drive purpose? What can businesses do to empower purpose-driven employees?
- Methods: interviews with employees and managers in five case study businesses, employee and manager workshops, stakeholder workshops and secondary analysis of case study data of 'Now is the Time for Purpose' report.
- Confirmed business case study partners: **SSE Transmission; ACS Clothing, Jerba Campervan, The Wise Group**
- Strong collaborative and business engagement approach, our stakeholder group and the wider business and policy community.

Gareth Williams

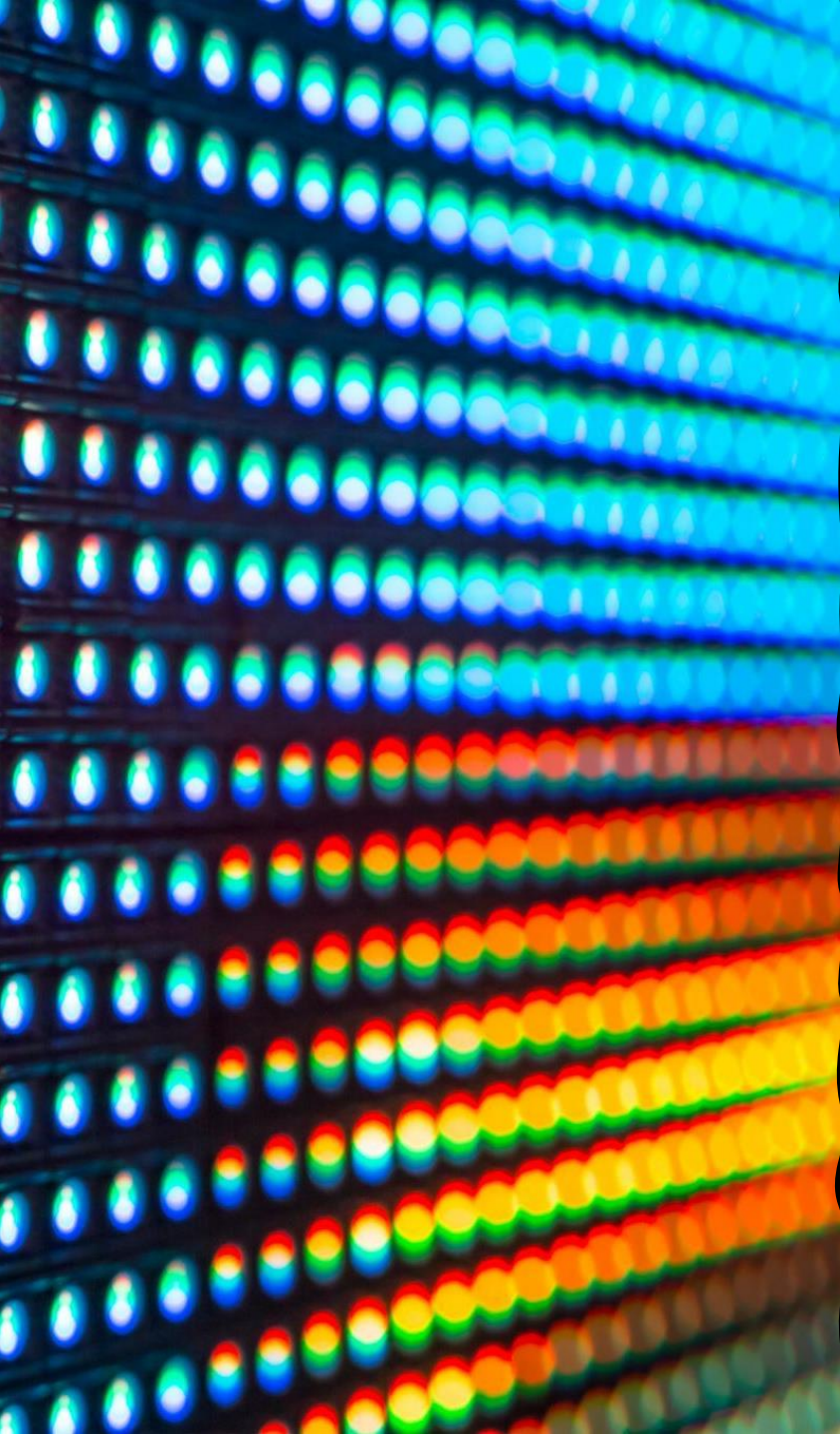
Prosper

Now is the Time for Purpose



Dr Anna Clover  
University of Glasgow

Purpose-led business models,  
productivity and meaningful work



# Purpose-led business models, productivity and meaningful work

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Dr Anna Clover  
Research Associate  
Sociology Department  
University of Glasgow

# Purpose-led business models

- Growing governmental, academic and practical interest in the potential for purpose-driven businesses to implement positive social and environmental change.
- *'Businesses have to recognise that they exist at the pleasure of society, not the other way around. They, therefore, need to be net contributors to society.'* (Barclays CEO/chairman Antony Jenkins, in White et al., 2017).
- Requires radical re-thinking as to the purpose of businesses within society – to strive beyond profit-making towards goals that centre societal and planetary welfare (Brosch, 2023).
- Organisations must consider how both their external actions and internal practices are informed by a demonstrable purpose that is ethically informed (George et al., 2023).

# Purpose in action

- What does purpose mean in action? – Development of values and ideals that make sense for a specific organisation. Should be the touchstone for all decisions, permeate all organisational levels (White et al., 2016).
- Requires structural changes – organisations must consider how key decisions are made and who is included, appropriate training for managers and employees, how actions based on purpose rather than profit are incentivised at all levels, how achieving purpose-informed goals will be recognised and measured within organisation (George et al., 2023, Villela et al., 2019, Steger, 2016, White et al., 2016) .

## Benefits and challenges

- Benefits: reputation of brand, greater customer satisfaction and loyalty, recruitment and retention of employees, increased productivity and wider societal and environmental benefits (Johnson et al., 2019, Steger, 2016, van Riel, 2012, von Ahsen and Gauch, 2021).
- Key challenge: '*Employee engagement is central in putting purpose into action*' (George et al., 2023:1848). Coherency between workers and employer's views of purpose – purpose must be meaningful to workers, value of workers labour to company's purpose must be clear (von Ahsen and Gauch, 2021).

# Meaningful work

- Current research tends to centre on either objective (e.g. *workplace structures, rules, policies*) or subjective (e.g. *individual's values, feelings, ambitions*) contributors to workers' experiences of meaningful work (Laaser and Karlsson, 2021, Laaser, 2022).
- For a full picture, need to understand how objective and subjective elements interact, within both formal and informal workplace practices - '*in relation to the interplay of workplace, managerial, societal and individual relations*' (Laaser and Karlsson (2021:798). How such processes interact and contribute to workers experiences of autonomy, recognition and dignity (Laaser and Bolton, 2022).
- Approach can strengthen alignment of employers and employees understanding of purpose-led work.

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Jackie Brierton  
GrowBiz

Purposeful Businesses



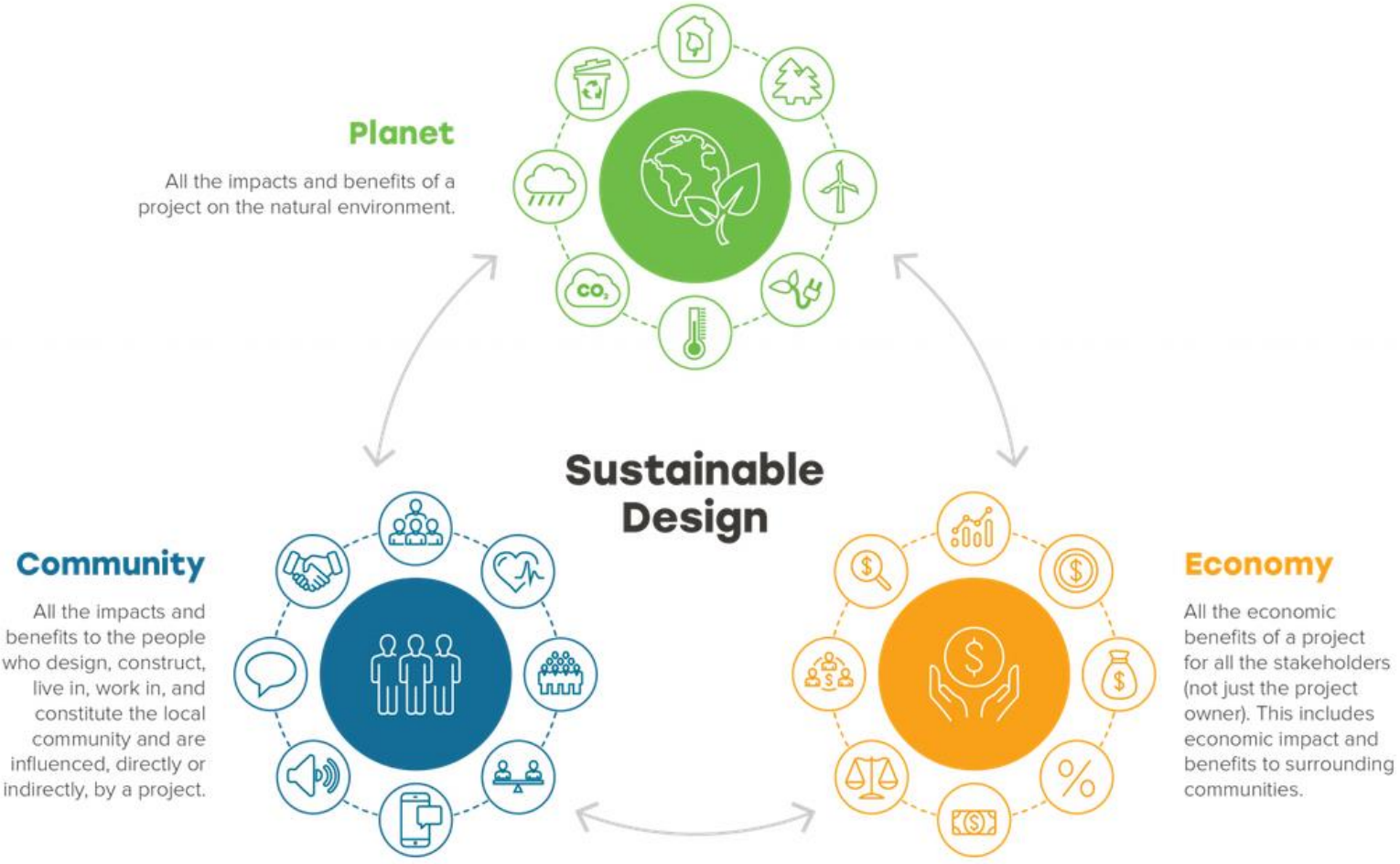
Eleonora Vanello

Peer Works - Prosper

New Ways of Thinking about Productivity

$$\frac{\text{Total output}}{\text{Total input}} = \text{Labor Productivity}$$

# Triple Bottom Line



Source: Making the Business Case for Triple Bottom Line and ESG, Jessica Glorius-Dangelo, <https://designwithma.com/>



Q&A

Group Discussion

# Questions

- In what ways do you think purpose-driven businesses can enhance productivity compared to traditional profit-focused models?
- How can businesses balance the need for profitability with the broader goals of social and environmental responsibility?
- What examples have you seen of successful purpose-led businesses? What made them successful? What can we learn from these examples?
- In your opinion, what can the Scottish government do to support and incentivise businesses to adopt purpose-driven practices?

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