



Meaningfulness at Work 2023

Creating meaningful workplaces
in 2023 and beyond

Voluntās

Meaningfulness at Work 2023

At Voluntās, everything we do is to make more lives more meaningful.

Every year, we study how employees feel organizations perform when it comes to fostering a meaningful workplace - a place where there is a strong sense of purpose, leadership, belonging, and personal growth.

That, we know, is the best possible condition for realizing human potential.

Table of Content

Methodology	p. 04
MWQ definition	p. 06
The four primary insights	p. 08
Three recommendations	p. 09
Editorial	p. 10
Insights	p. 11
Case: Novozymes	p. 18
Case: Scan Global Logistics	p. 25
About Voluntās	p. 30
Contact	p. 31

Methodology

Numbers and Distribution

Respondents

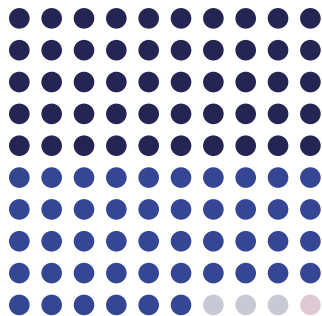
+6.000

Countries

8

Australia
Denmark
Germany
India
New Zealand
Norway
United Kingdom
United States

Gender



Men

50%



Prefer to self-describe

3%



Women

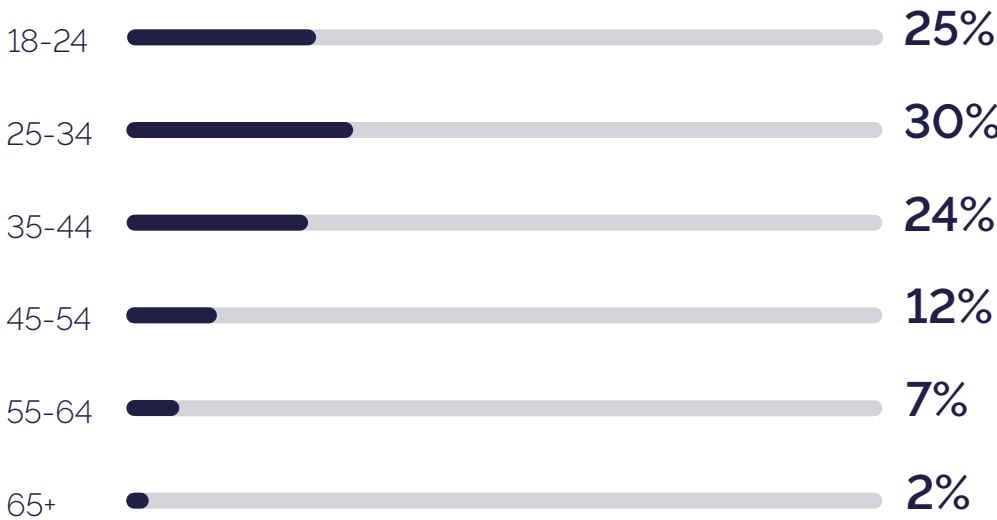
46%



Non-binary

1%

Age groups



Methodology

How did we do it?

Since 2015, Voluntās' Center for Applied Meaningfulness has carried out surveys with 100.000+ professionals across cultures to help capture the essence of what constitutes meaning in a workplace setting – from multinational corporations and private foundations to NGOs and public agencies. This research has enabled us to identify the four primary drivers of meaning in organizations: Purpose, Leadership, Belonging, and Personal Growth.

The Global Meaningful Work Quotient (MWQ) is an aggregate agreeability score composed of the four drivers. Each driver's agreeability score is determined by four statements, resulting in a total of sixteen statements.

This year, more than 6,000 respondents participated from 8 countries worldwide.

Countries

21%	United States
16%	Germany
12%	United Kingdom
11%	Australia
11%	New Zealand
11%	Denmark
9%	India
9%	Norway

Gender

50%	Man
46%	Woman
3%	Prefer to self-describe
1%	Non-binary

Age

25%	18-24
30%	25-34
24%	35-44
12%	45-54
7%	55-64
2%	65+

Data collection methodology

The data collection took place between March and April 2023. The survey was translated into German, Danish, and Hindi, in addition to the base language of English. Based on browsing history, all respondents had their display language auto detected by our data collection tool, Qualtrics. However, they also had the option to select a different display language from any of the available translations at any point during the survey.

RIWI utilizes web intercept technology to access a diverse sample of respondents through online polling, including in hard-to-reach contexts. Web users who access incorrect or outdated web domains purchased by RIWI were invited to complete our survey voluntarily; this form of sampling reduces self-selection bias, social desirability bias, acquiescence bias, and coverage bias, and research shows that all internet users have a roughly equal likelihood of being reached by this method.

Data collection partner: RIWI

For all countries, data was collected by our partner, RIWI: a company specializing in real-time sentiment research across the globe. We are grateful to RIWI for their valuable support and collaboration on this research.

MWQ definition

What is the Meaningful Work Quotient?

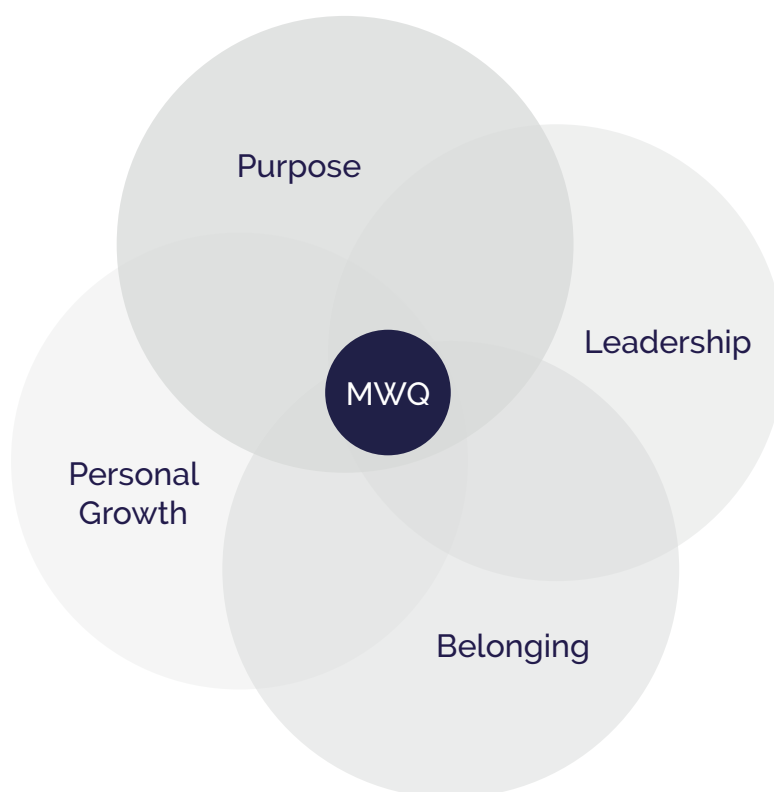
The Meaningful Work Quotient is based on four drivers of meaningfulness: Purpose, Leadership, Belonging and Personal Growth.

At Voluntās' Center for Applied Meaningfulness, we have consumed and analyzed every piece of research, poetry, and empirical industry data about what makes work meaningful. We have conducted the MWQ-survey across all significant industries, functions, hierarchy levels, age groups, and geographies.

We have tested these statistically and condensed our findings into four foundational building blocks that drive meaningfulness for leaders as well as employees.

MWQ definition

The four MWQ-Drivers



Purpose

You feel a clear direction and tangible impact in your work, and you think that the company's purpose aligns with your own moral compass and resonates with what you find important in life.

Belonging

You feel a sense of community, inclusion, and team-spirit, and, in general, have strong social ties with your colleagues whom you miss when you are not physically together at work.

Leadership

You feel guided in your daily work, and it is clear what your daily objectives and priorities are and what you need to achieve.

Personal Growth

Every day, you become a little bit more aware of who you are and who you are not, as well as increasingly more able to understand what you want to become and what you do not want to become while being given the feedback to develop accordingly.

Summary

The four primary insights

1 Work has become more meaningful, but it's too soon to celebrate

While the MWQ-score has improved globally, we are still below the pre-COVID levels. While many organizations have bounced back from the “meaning recession,” they are still navigating a new reality in which changes in employee attitudes and ways of working challenge workplace cultures.

2 Employees want more humanness and active listening from their leaders

Leadership is the most lagging driver in this year's study, as 32 percent are unsure or disagree that their direct leader provides meaningful guidance. The trend is driven by a lack of trust, recognition, and active listening.

3 Work is least meaningful for the youngest generation

Compared to an average of 74 percent among those aged 25 and older, 68 percent of respondents under 25 agree that their work is meaningful. The youngest age group is less inclined to believe that their employer shares their values and less likely to think that their work efforts and results are recognized.

4 If you want to learn how to lead with meaning, study India

We opened our office in India last year, but little did we know that an astonishing 81 percent of all employees in India find their work meaningful. In comparison, UK and Germany are tied at the bottom at 70 percent. India has especially cracked the code relative to other countries on active listening, trust, and community feeling.

How to become a meaningful organization

Three recommendations

1

Measure the sense of meaning and give leaders the tools to drive it

Measuring the level of meaningfulness that the employees experience in their work is the first step of creating more meaningful organizations.

Such measures offer insights into how the employees' lives are impacted by work - which is inevitably an integral part of life. They also offer insights into how each leaders' behavior and ability to lead with purpose and along the company-DNA.

2

Conduct a "Cultural Due Diligence" on all people processes

Review all steps of the employee journey – from attraction and recruitment to onboarding, development, and retention.

Does each step represent our culture and DNA? What original or surprising elements could you add to differentiate and amplify the culture you want to create?

How can we optimize being a meaningful workplace – which structures or processes do we need to make more human?

3

Hire people who can shape your culture in a meaningful way

Poor cultural fit accounts for 89 percent of all hiring failures.

Are you screening candidates for their self-awareness and cultural preference to assess whether they would thrive in your organization?

If not, Voluntās has invented a tool for exactly that, which is tested and implemented across industries – from production and logistics to retail.

The tool is applicable for M&A due diligences as well.

Editorial

Why should anyone be led by you?

Before people were allowed to enter the Temple of Apollo at Delphi in ancient Greece, they were confronted by the inscription 'Gnothi seauton' meaning 'Know thyself' on the marble forecourt of the temple. It commanded people to face their selves, including their strengths, limitations, humanity, and mortality, before consulting the sacred Oracle and the gods for advice. It was considered a virtue to look inward, to establish who you were and who you were not, before asking others to relate to you.

How many leaders are today confronted with the same inscription and demand before entering the "Temple of Leadership"? The answer is not many. Recent estimates suggest that only 9 percent of all individuals possess good self-awareness, yet studies show that 90 percent of all leaders believe their performance is among the best 10 percent. There is little reason to assume that leaders should be more self-aware than others – rather the opposite.

Having conducted thousands of leadership assessments, we at Voluntās have concluded that the more self-aware a leader is, the better their performance is rated by their employees, peers, and superiors. Conversely, the more over-confident leaders are about their performance, the lower they are rated. Leaders with good self-awareness who have confronted not only their strengths but their limitations, humanity, and mortality, are simply better leaders.

Leadership is one of the four fundamental drivers for work to be meaningful. This year, it scores lower than all other drivers, trailing behind Purpose, Belonging, and Personal Growth. And no wonder. For decades we have portrayed leaders as exceptional, divine beings who always have the right answer at the right time. As geniuses. As oracles.

It is a myth, of course. The lonely genius is just lonely – true genius is something we create together. But we like to make heroes. And for every step up the career ladder, every leader gets a boost of confidence, and as more and more rely on your Oracle advice, confronting yourself and your limitations becomes easy to overlook or neglect.

It may be time to face the inscription on the marble wall again. Before becoming a great leader, you need to be a good human being. And to know what "good" or "great" means to you, you need to know who you are, who you are not, and how to leverage that self-awareness. As coined by two professors in the early 2000s, "Why should anyone be led by you?"

Don't be an oracle. Be a human.

In the Meaningfulness at Work Report 2023, we dive into why this is important and how selected leaders and organizations have approached creating more meaningful workplaces. Enjoy!

Our latest study found that **47 percent** of the meaning an individual feels in their life can be explained by the meaning they find in their work.

Source: Voluntās, Global Meaningfulness Index, 2023



Nicolai E. E. Iversen
Chief Philosophy Officer

N. Iversen

Insights

MWQ

Exploring meaningfulness at work

MWQ globally

Work has become more Meaningful

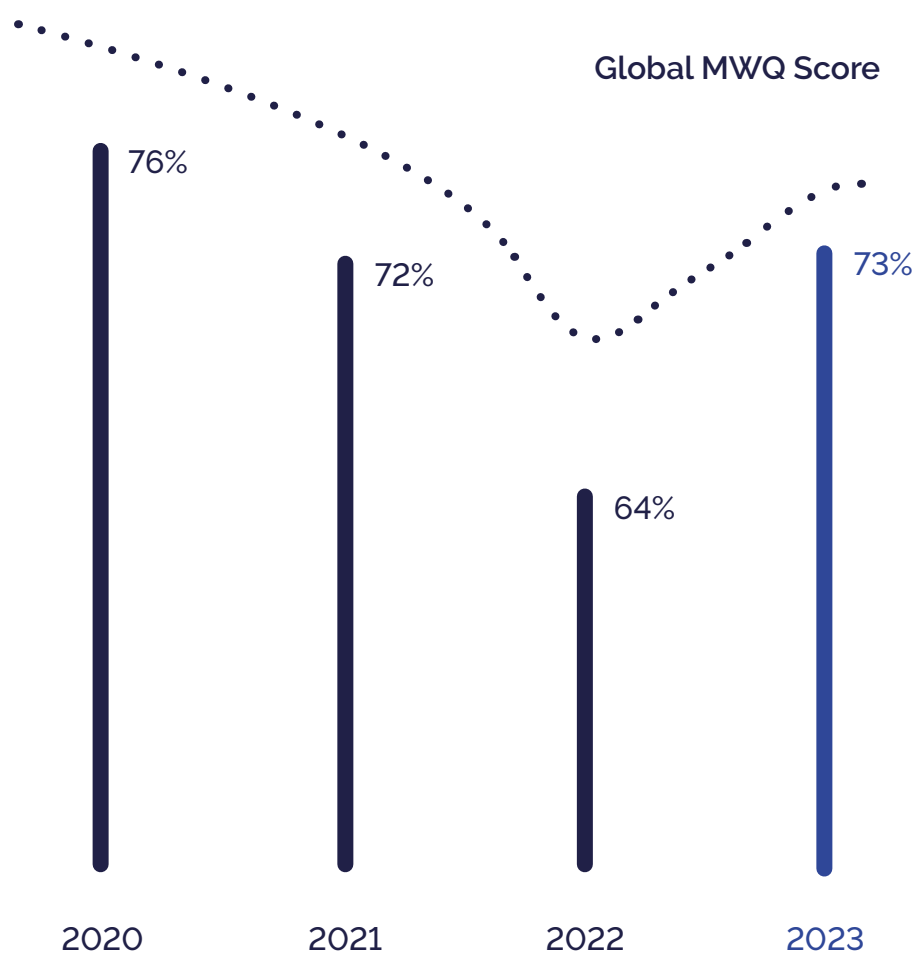
Meaningfulness at work bounced back this year.

Our Global Meaningfulness Report in 2022 showed that the Meaningful Work Quotient (MWQ) had decreased to an all-time low of 64 after steadily declining from a score of 76 in 2020. In 2023, the MWQ increased 14 percent from the previous year to a score of 73.

The increase in MWQ score comes with increases on all four drivers of meaningfulness, ranging from a 10 percent increase in Leadership to an increase of 18 percent in Personal Growth.

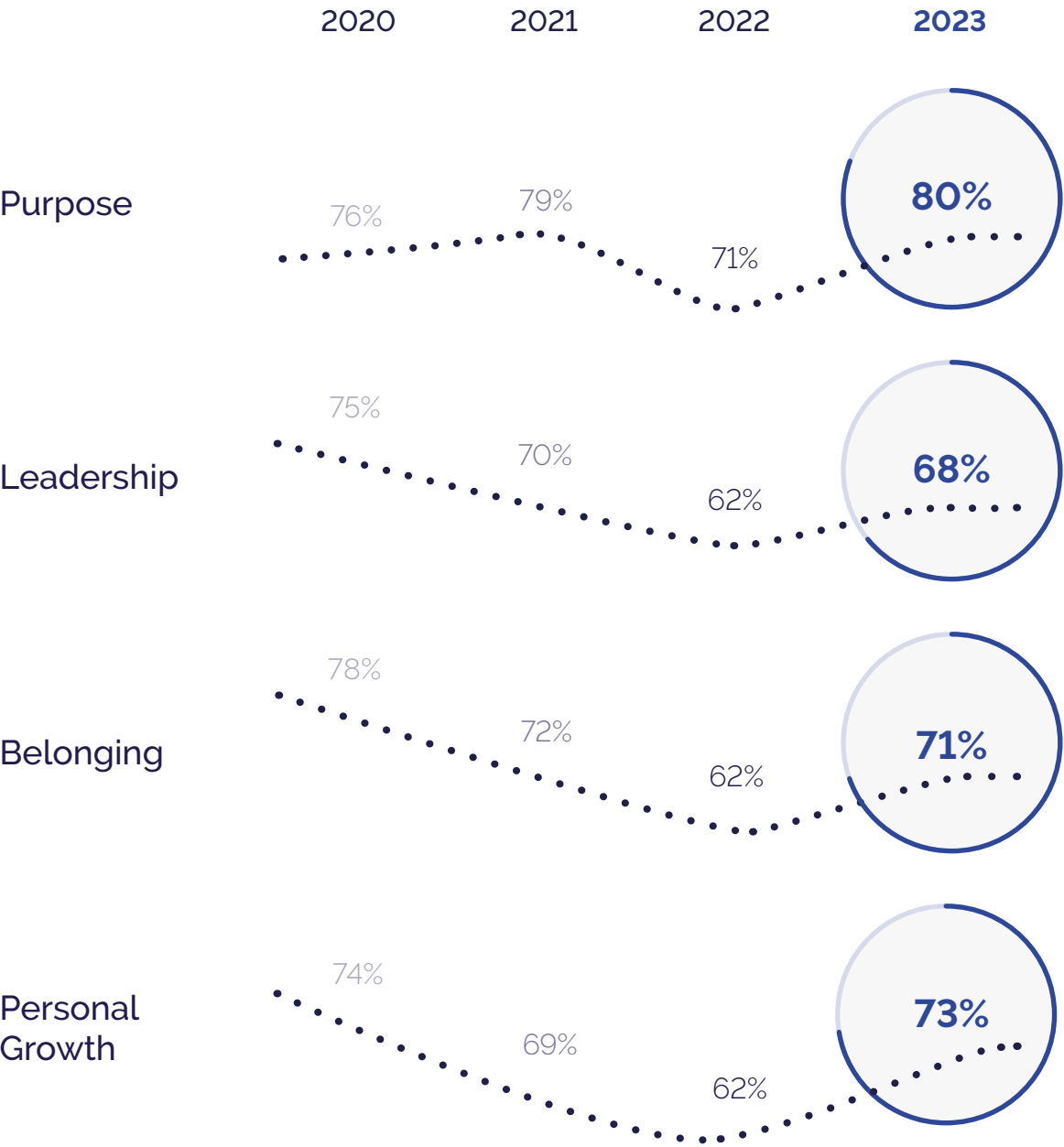
Purpose continues to be the leading driver of meaningful work, scoring 80, while Leadership and Belonging still lag behind.

The most significant detractors of meaningfulness are leaders' lack of ability to listen actively and show trust in their interactions with their employees. (Only 64 percent of people feel that their leader takes the time to ask how they are doing).



MWQ across drivers

Purpose is highest - Leadership is lowest



MWQ across age groups

Youngest people still experience the least meaning at work

Looking at meaningfulness across age groups, we see a tendency for younger people to experience lower levels of meaning in their work. Only 68 percent of those under 25 agree or strongly agree that their work is meaningful, compared to an average of 74 percent of those aged 25 and older.

The youngest age group is less inclined to believe that their employer shares their values and less likely to think that their work efforts and results are recognized.

The most obvious generational difference is found in young people's lower sense of purpose, whereas all age groups are similarly inclined to experience a lower sense of meaningful leadership at work.

Global MWQ across age groups



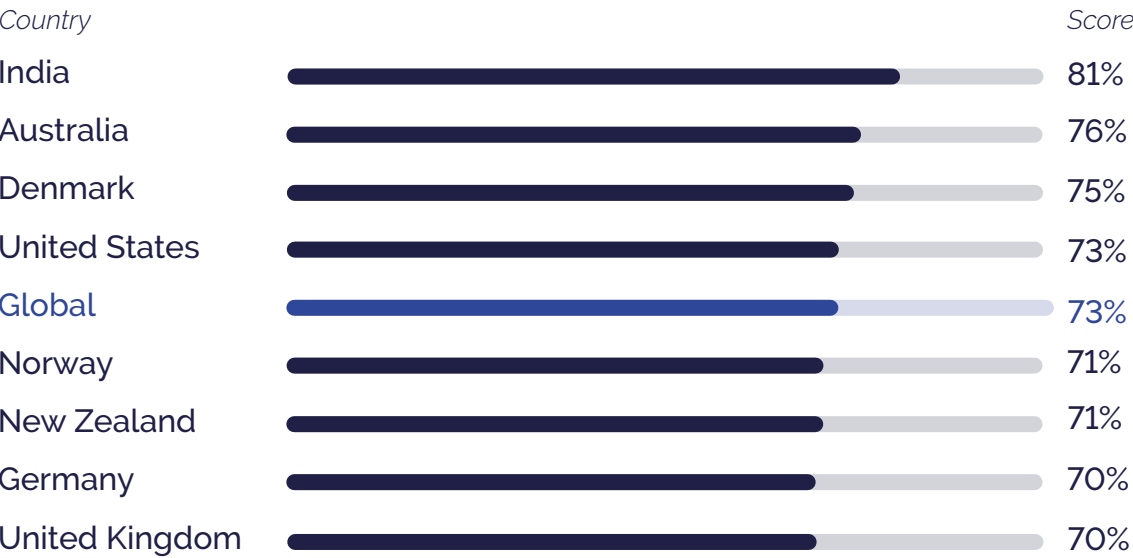
MWQ across countries

India inspires: Highest percentage of employees to find their work meaningful

Looking at the overall MWQ by countries, India is the highest scoring, with 81 percent of Indians agreeing or strongly agreeing that their work is meaningful. The comparably high levels of meaningfulness experienced by Indian workers seem, in large part, to be driven by meaningful leadership.

84 percent of Indians believe that their leader provides them with the trust they need to fulfill their job compared to the global average of 72 percent, and Indians are the most likely to agree that their leader takes the time to be genuinely interested in how they are doing both personally and professionally.

Global MWQ score across countries



MWQ among women and men

Women experience **higher level of meaning at work**



♀
Women
74%



♂
Men
72%

MWQ across industries

Significant differences: Accounting & Finance at the top, Energy at the bottom

The degree of meaningfulness experienced at work varies across industries. The highest scoring is accounting and finance, with 81 percent of employees feeling that their work is meaningful.

At the other end of the spectrum, the energy and retail industries score the lowest, with only 64 percent and 67 percent, respectively, reporting a sense of meaning in their work. The marked differences in scores indicate significant differences in culture and working conditions in different job sectors.

Global MWQ score across industries





Case

Unlocking Leadership: Novozymes' Journey to Unlock Growth

Case



novozymes® 

Marianne Bie Frydendahl
Vice President, People & Organization

Novozymes is on a mission to unlock growth. But how do you preserve the essentials of a thriving culture while nurturing change and transformation to create a profitable business? As a company powered by biotech, where nature meets engineering, Novozymes found inspiration for their approach to meaningful leadership in how a flock of birds navigates together toward their destination.

Novozymes exists to find biological answers for better lives in a growing world. With increasing populations, fundamental changes in nutritional habits, and protein demands that far exceed the practices of today, the world is screaming for sustainable solutions. But while Novozymes has become a leader in the industry, the company has for consecutive years struggled to grow in an increasingly competitive market. To beat the trend of some years without growth, the company launched its strategy 'Unlock Growth' under the leadership of new CEO Ester Baiget. But to make the strategy move from paper to reality, one particular issue needed to be addressed.

"As much as we believed in the direction of the strategy, we actually put a dedicated must-win battle into it, that we labeled 'succeeding with the strategy'," Marianne Bie Frydendahl explains.

"It may sound redundant or even borderline foolish, but it serves as a constant, tangible reminder to always think about how to execute. And with the number one driver of succeeding with the strategy being a unified leadership, we gave birth to our global program: Unlocking Leadership to Unlock Growth."

The solution: Unlocking Leadership

The first step in the program was to translate the strategy into the core leadership capabilities needed to deliver on the strategy, defining which behavior and attributes from the existing culture to keep and which to evolve. One core theme across the new leadership framework was unity.

"In Novozymes, we are often inspired by the attributes of rapid animals like cheetahs or falcons. But as leaders of Novozymes, we need to be in formation, in unity, like the birds who fly side-by-side in the hundreds or thousands.

It is fascinating how they can constantly change shape and direction without becoming apart. By flying together, they can fly longer. Science tells us that every bird is attentive not only to its neighbours in the flock but also to the 6-7 birds around them – some close, some far away. In many ways, they think end-to-end, they think holistically, they think as one enterprise. In Novozymes, we are privileged by having good leaders. But we needed to support them to succeed as one, in flying even closer together," Marianne Bie Frydendahl.


novozymes 

Founded
2000

Yearly Oxygen
DKKb 17,553 (2022)

Human beings
6.527

Purpose
To find biological answers for better lives in a growing world



***"As much as
we believed in
the direction
of the strategy,
we actually put
a dedicated
must-win battle
into it, that
we labelled
'succeeding
with the
strategy'"***

In collaboration with Voluntās, each leadership capability was broken down into globally aligned, measurable behavior so that three distinct traits accompanied each of the four capabilities (See purple box below). As such, the capabilities outlined the specific criteria every leader, from CEO to team leader, from all functions and markets, should navigate by to contribute to better unity.

"We are not changing our purpose. We do not compromise our values or our sustainability pledge. But we need to constantly stay in formation, change shape and direction together when needed to protect our core and translate our purpose into growth in our top line. This agility requires four leadership capabilities that we all share and aspire to live up to. Together, they define what good leadership looks like for us – to unlock growth," Marianne Bie Frydendahl.

A global success (so far)

But with limited time and resources, how do you make all leaders relate to the same leadership capabilities at more or less the same time in a meaningful manner? The recipe for Novozymes consisted of four elements.

First, make it simple and tangible. Unlocking Leadership was tied closely to existing concepts, making it clear how it is a natural lever for the already known strategy and a leadership-specific extension of the organizational values.

Second, "toolify" it. "Unlocking Leadership" was translated into a data-driven 360-degree feedback tool, a revised template for the Individual Development Plan, and specific training modules targeting each leadership capability.

Third, focus on facilitating meaningful conversations between human beings. Not trying to control every single outcome with rigorous supervision but instead giving leaders the means and inspiration to have good, genuine conversations, weaving the thriving and self-awareness of the individual into the needs and development of the organization. And then trusting them to apply the global framework locally how it makes sense to their context and team.

Over the course of a year, 583 leaders at Novozymes have received 360-degree feedback through "Unlocking Leadership," with 95 percent receiving in-person feedback on the insights. 82 percent perceived it as meaningful and valuable, and 73 percent anchored specific learnings into development plans.

"It works, because it is concrete", Marianne Bie Frydendahl explains. *"It tells us what we need to do, using fewer words and leaving little room for confusion, creating a common language for good leadership and a few impactful tools to support it,"* Marianne Bie Frydendahl.

And fourth? Humor. Using a bit of irony generates smiles and laughter, fostering a sense of belonging and humanness. *"We expect a lot from our leaders. They need to be good people managers, be on top of their function, and navigate the many changes we are making in a competing business landscape, while coping with the uncertainty of an incoming merger. So, when we introduce new global initiatives, we need to be incredibly mindful of balancing the need for unity with respect for the individual context. We are all human, so we decided to create a small sit-com-like film, where we exposed all the worst-practice examples of how not to conduct development conversations to make it more fun and engaging and less corporate,"* Marianne Bie Frydendahl.

Leadership Capabilities at Novozymes

We need to **LEAD FOR PURPOSE**, constantly guiding the organization and making our impact clear and tangible. A beautiful statement is not enough. We need to connect our efforts and actions to our purpose.

Then we need to **DRIVE CHANGE**, to evolve and grow. We are not satisfied with status quo. This takes honesty, mutual respect and trust.

We need to continue to lead with a **HUMAN TOUCH**, reminding everyone of their right to sit at the table, constantly challenging our own biases and ways of working to enhance diversity and inclusion.

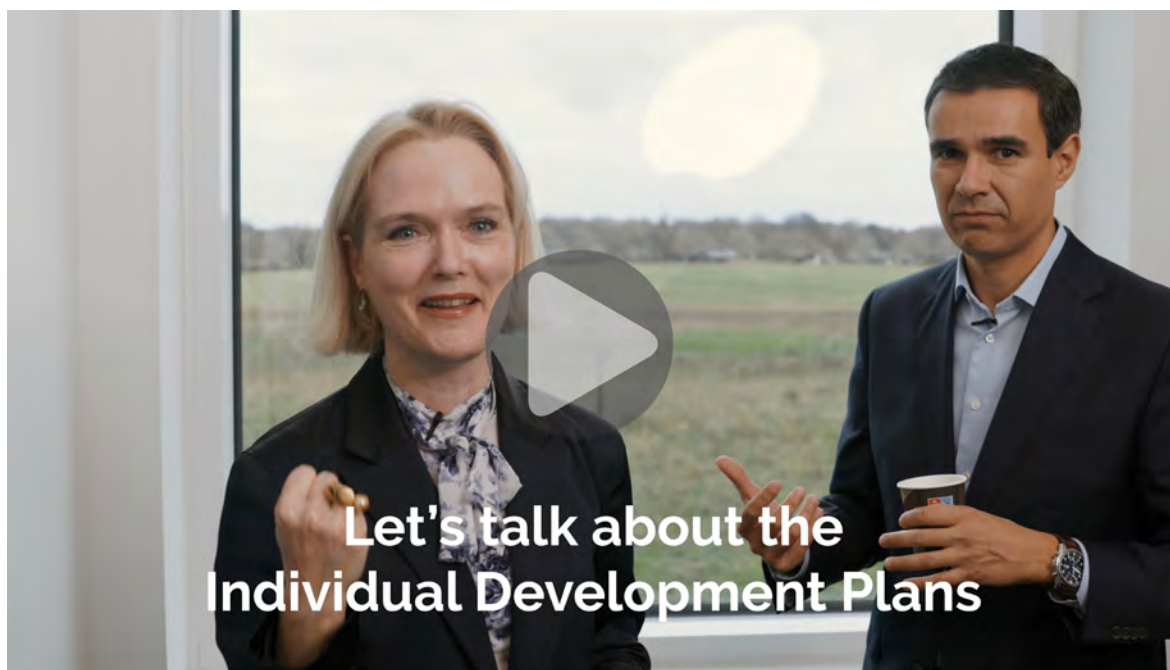
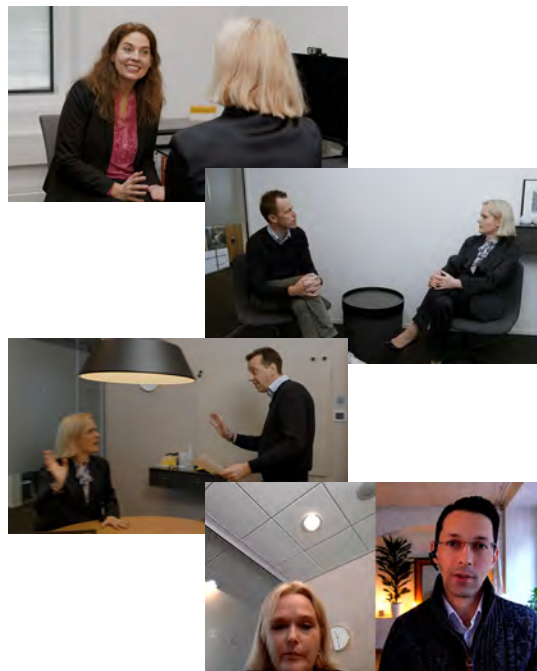
We need to **FOLLOW THROUGH**. We have our purpose. We have our values. We have our strategy. Now is the time to act. To be accountable. To follow through on the strategy. In unity.

Movie to launch individual development plans

While Voluntās were responsible for the directing, filming, and editing, the movie consisted of Novozymes staff as actors giving a human touch to an essential topic.

Scenes, characters, and punchlines were later repurposed as GIFs and images to serve as a reminder to prioritize meaningful conversations. Knowing that in this year's Meaningfulness at Work report, the lowest scoring item globally was *"my leader takes time to ask how I am doing both professionally and personally, and I feel that he/she listens and takes action,"* then nothing is more important to improve our sense of meaning and belonging in the workplace than exactly that.

In the words of Marianne Bie Frydendahl, *"A thriving business needs a thriving organization and vice versa. While we are far from perfect, I am proud of what we have achieved with Unlocking Leadership and how our leaders across the globe have used it to drive change and follow through, all while leading for purpose and with a human touch. It shows that it is here to stay."*

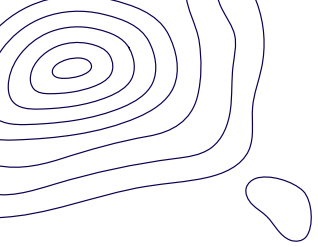




SCAN GLOBAL
LOGISTICS

Case

Forwarding Organizational DNA: Sustaining Culture Amidst Rapid Growth



Case



**SCAN GLOBAL
LOGISTICS**

Mads Drejer
Global Chief Operating Officer &
Chief Commercial Officer

Scan Global Logistics (SGL) has successfully preserved its organizational DNA and fostered a culture of meaningfulness even amidst substantial growth. But it takes continued priority, consistency, and processes to keep forwarding the organization's unique DNA to new recruits, new acquisitions, new leaders, and the organization at large.

From a wrinkled piece of paper to reality: Making culture a little less complicated

It's been almost five years since the executive management team sat around a table, each taking turns expressing why they work at SGL and what makes the culture unique. It was the first of many discussions, trying to grasp the essence of the rapidly growing forwarder. They knew that what they were part of was special. But they did not know exactly how to express it. More colleagues from across the globe joined the conversation. Customers and suppliers were invited to give their honest feedback. And then, during a leadership workshop in rural parts of Denmark, a wrinkled piece of paper was circulated. "We make the world a little less complicated," it read. That is why SGL exists. But how? By always bringing a human approach to everyone, everywhere. An approach that, in the weeks and months that followed, was captured in Fun, Integrity, Respect, and, not least, Entrepreneurship.

Easier said than done, of course. But fast forward to 2023, and SGL has expanded its workforce by almost 200 percent, achieved an annual average revenue growth of 33 percent to reach USD 3,506 billion, with a presence in more than 45 countries across all inhabited continents. What was an anticipated future became reality – and then some! Adding the impact of a global pandemic and the integration of 5-7 acquisitions per year, you would think that the organizational culture would suffer.

Globally, as documented by Voluntas, work in the world outside SGL became significantly less meaningful. The logistics industry, in particular, had a hard time with disrupted supply chains trying to catch up with inflated demand. But in SGL, something different happened. During 2020 and 2021, SGL not only improved their MWQ score from 75 to 77 but also stayed an impressive 15 percent above the global logistics benchmark. While that seemed almost too good to be true, 2022 resulted in the highest Meaningful Work Quotient (MWQ) ever documented for a company of its size, with SGL further improving by 3 percent, reaching a total score of 80.

"We've always had a clear intuition that SGL is a meaningful place to work," Mads Drejer, Global COO & CCO, explains.

"But being clear on our DNA has enabled us to be even better at promoting the right behavior, attracting the right people, and anchoring who we strive to be in all corners and processes of the company. This is a continuous journey that never ends, and while we remain our biggest skeptics, we will try our best to create a meaningful culture and constantly develop the right tools and structures to remind us about who we want to become."

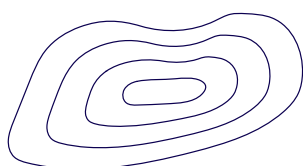
SCAN GLOBAL LOGISTICS

Founded
1975

Yearly Oxygen
USDb 3,506 (2022)

Human beings
3.500

Purpose
Making the world a little less complicated



"We don't expect our leaders to be perfect, but they need to be motivated to create a meaningful workplace"



Cultural Due Diligence: Scrutinizing every step of the employee journey

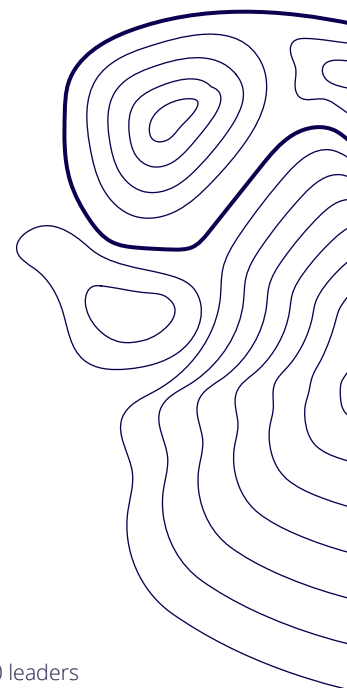
According to Mads Drejer, structure and tools are essential in scaling a culture during extreme growth. Getting data-driven insights into how meaningful it is to work for SGL is one thing. But SGL went further to look at every single step of the employee journey and examine how each step, each process, could be tweaked to amplify the right culture. Starting with the leaders, SGL's DNA was translated into tangible behavior for all leaders to get recurring feedback on their performance according to the company's four virtues. The results were clear. The leaders performing well in their 360-degree leadership assessments also had a 53 percent higher MWQ-score in their teams and a 23 percent better performance on retention. SGL then focused on their recruitment process and started assessing all potential candidates for leadership positions on their self-awareness and cultural fit to SGL. Finally, SGL has installed a strong focus on culture into the due diligence process for all potential M&A targets.

"SGL runs on the energy of good people. When they grow, we grow. This is where our organic growth comes from, and it is what unlocks the synergies and multiplier effect in our acquired growth. We don't expect our leaders to be perfect, but they need to be motivated to create a meaningful workplace. This starts already before we let people in through our doors. Whether through recruitment or acquisition, we have invested in a rigorous process, conducting a cultural due diligence on every individual and M&A target to qualify how they fit into our DNA and culture. Culture might have an appetite for strategy, but nothing eats culture like poor leadership, and we will never realize our commercial potential without the right leaders who share our visions and virtues," Mads Drejer, Global COO & CCO.

Vision 1-3-5: Towards 2027

Last year, SGL launched its Vision 2027. 170 leaders from across the globe were gathered in the middle of a forest for a three-day festival to kick it off. Labeled 1-3-5, it aims to unite SGL's cultural DNA with its commercial ambitions. '1' points to the aspiration of becoming the most purpose-driven and meaningful company in the logistics industry. For SGL, culture and business are fundamentally viewed as one and the same from the core belief that by growing its people, it grows its business. '3' points to the aspiration of reaching the best 3rd in the logistics industry on earnings. For SGL to realize its potential, earnings function as financial oxygen to ensure a strong and sustainable business with the appropriate attention and discipline to maximize value. '5' points to the aspiration of achieving a total USD +5 billion in revenue. The rationale, according to SGL, is that the more it grows in size and footprint, the bigger an impact it can have on the world to un-complicate logistics. In the spring of 2023, SGL welcomed CVC Capital Partners as new majority owners as part of entering the next phase of the company's growth.

"As much as we enjoy the prospect of making SGL a success in financial terms, that would be worth absolutely nothing to us if it was not achieved while having fun along the way, paying respect to the people who work hard every day, being entrepreneurial in the market and having the integrity with us to be able to look ourselves in the mirror and be proud of what we do. We are now a USD 3bn company, but without continuously mastering our DNA and human approach, our '1', we will never achieve '3' or '5'. With new owners on board and armed with humbleness, we remain committed to becoming the most purpose-driven and meaningful company in the logistics industry. One shipment at a time," Mads Drejer, Global COO & CCO.



Who we are

About Voluntās

At Voluntās, philosophers, anthropologists, psychologists, economists, dramaturgists, sociologists, political scientists and people of yet other academic backgrounds are all advisors by profession and philosophers by heart.

Together, we specialize in advising and working with companies, directorates, boards, investors, foundations, owners, leaders and governments on how to create, adapt and drive a meaningful culture, brand, society and planet.

We believe that this approach significantly increases the quality of living, while we know that it sustainably accelerates the productivity and profitability of doing business.

We pursue advisory and analytics to realize human potential and make more lives more meaningful for the colleagues in organizations, the consumers of brands, the citizens in societies and for all us children of our blue planet.

7
Offices worldwide

22
Nationalities

20
Industries

50
Countries with projects

76
Employees



Contact

Get in touch with us



Nicolai E. E. Iversen

Chief Philosophy Officer & Associate Partner

nei@voluntas.com
+45 20 10 83 99



Netti Fuglesang

Associate Partner

nfu@voluntas.com
+47 924 55 910



Niklas Kabel Pedersen

Chief Operating Officer & Partner

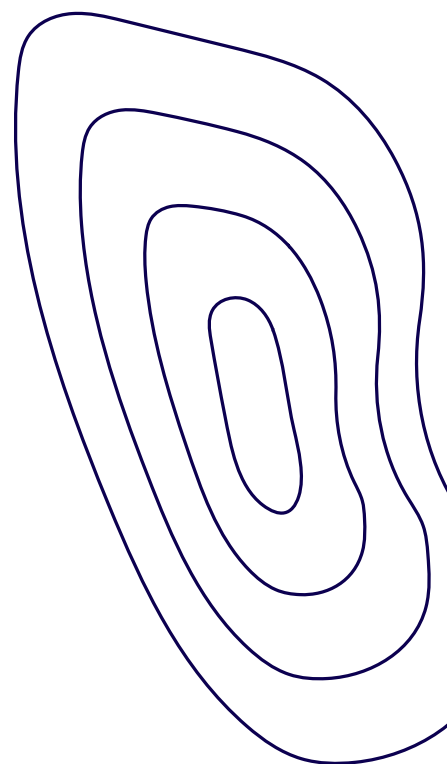
nkp@voluntas.com
+45 61 33 30 13



Kristian Lykke Winberg

Chief Possibility Officer & Associate Partner

klw@voluntas.com
+45 60 64 70 13



Voluntās

Realizing Human Potential