Grounding the Language Games of Business Purpose in the Age of Artificial Intelligence

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Abstract

Despite its centrality to organizational identity and strategy, the notion of 'business purpose' continues to escape a broadly shared consensus. We propose that this elusiveness may stem from the concept's family resemblance structure, which resists reduction to a singular, unified definition. Drawing on Wittgensteinian linguistic analysis, we argue that business purpose functions as a variable form of life, constituted through diverse language games across organizational contexts. As contemporary societal challenges increasingly orient business activity toward socially responsible aims, we explore how organizations pursuing such goals can leverage AI-assisted discursive tools to anchor their purposeful identities within the nuanced demands of their evolving environments.

Keywords: Family resemblance; Language games; Corporate purpose; Artificial intelligence; Wittgenstein.

Since Milton Friedman (in)famously argued that the only responsibility of business is to increase its profits (1970), there has been over a half century of heated debate on this question. And though the issue remains unsettled, the needle has been tipping markedly in the other direction due to an ascendant business-purpose movement championed to confront grand challenges facing society – namely, climate change, inequality, pollution, and global health (Kaplan, 2023). And yet, while the movement has picked up considerable steam, consensus is still conspicuously lacking within it, regarding to what purpose business is to be held responsible (Frerichs & Teichert, 2021). We believe this uncertainty may stem largely from the 'family resemblance' nature of the terminology, which defies attempts to unify all usages into a single definition.

We provide broad ontological footing for this conception of business purpose through the lens of Wittgensteinian linguistic analysis, to demonstrate that business functions as a variable *form of life* across myriad different cases and contexts, resulting from the activity's anthropological grounding as a common human practice akin to counting, measuring, and gaming. This makes it difficult if not impossible to coalesce all business activities into a common purposeful conception, allowing 'business purpose' to function according to *family resemblance* – a term coined by Wittgenstein to describe words whose meanings are constituted by overlapping similarities, as with members of a family in which no set of criterial features is sufficient to unify all members (Rosch & Mervis, 1975).

From here, we move on to discuss how the ascendant ESG and corporate purpose movements seek to refocus business enterprise in various socially responsible directions, each defined by different missions and brand identities consistent with the family resemblance nature of business purpose. Ultimately, we explore ways in which such paradigms might be strengthened via the growing presence of AI-assisted workplace platforms, which offer discursive means for organizational actors to hone ethical competence and build cohesive and context-specific shared purpose in the workplace, supply chain, and customer base.

The Grammatical Ontology of Business Purpose

Ludwig Wittgenstein offers a powerful methodology of conceptual analysis into the grammatical identity of philosophical terms. By investigating their proper usage, the true meaning of important concepts such as for example, thought, knowledge, mind, will, or invention is revealed (Wittgenstein, 1953). This approach can also help us gain a fuller grasp of the nature of the concept of business purpose, which may shed ontological light on why discussion on the topic has historically not gained greater traction in the wider management literature. Through a complimentary lens, Donaldson and Walsh begin their seminal article Toward a Theory of Business (2015) with a revealing lexical thought experiment asking readers to complete the following analogy:

Law is to justice, as medicine is to health, as business is to ______.

They report that subjects tend first to ponder in silence before eventually suggesting something akin to 'profit' or ‘wealth’. Respondents typically then turn to widely varying suggestions ranging from micro processes of coordination, exchange, innovation, and production to macro dynamics of commerce, economy, and collective wellbeing, before descending cynically into greed, power, and oppression. The authors draw three key takeaways from this result: First that we grapple with the purpose of business, second that we have trouble distinguishing various business enterprises from business more broadly, and finally that we know business might not be an unalloyed good. They suggest this creates a conceptual framing environment in which a common sense of business purpose eludes apprehension. To help rectify this problem, they set out to construct a general purposive theory of business themselves, which they argue is best defined as *optimized collective value*.

Business as Variable Form of Life

The trouble with such a concept – as Donaldson and Walsh acknowledge – is that the extent to which optimized collective value may be shared among various stakeholders will vary greatly from business to business. For instance, some have argued that singularly well-disposed companies may have a moral duty of assistance in the wake of natural disasters (Friedland, 2015; Wolitz, 2019). Still other businesses might go further by choosing to devote themselves to social purpose aims on a continual basis (Gelles, 2022). And while the social responsibility movement is growing, such organizations remain in the minority, with only 23 percent of corporations having explicit social purpose statements (Purpose Brand LLC, 2024). This may stem from the *family resemblance* nature of business purpose, extending to myriad different instantiations. Indeed, Lancastre et al. (2024) argue that the concept of social entrepreneurship seems to follow a family resemblance structure according to which various descriptive attributes and ethical positions define different subtypes. They identify twelve distinct family resemblance attributes extending to various degrees across different social enterprises, including the transformational, the proactive, the resourceful, the risk embracing, the profit reinvesting, and the scalable. They find such attributes are moderated variously by nine distinct ethical approaches, which they group into three classical overarching categories, namely, consequentialism, deontology, and virtue theory.

Accordingly, business purpose more broadly would share this special property with common concepts in ordinary language such as 'game' and 'number' – which, as Wittgenstein demonstrates – lack any essential criterial aspect(s) sufficient to define them in every context. Instead, their meanings are constituted by overlapping similarities, as with members of a family in which no single or set of criterial attributes such as build, facial features, eye color, gait, temperament, is shared among them all (Komatsu, 1992; Rosch & Mervis, 1975). As

Wittgenstein demonstrates in the following thought experiment, the concept of game functions in this fashion:

> Consider for example the proceedings that we call ‘games’. I mean board-games, card-games, ball-games, Olympic games, and so on. What is common to them all?—Don't say: "There must be something common, or they would not be called 'games' "—but look and see whether there is anything common to all.—For if you look at them you will not see something that is common to all, but similarities, relationships, and a whole series of them at that. To repeat: don't think, but look!—Look for example at board-games, with their multifarious relationships. Now pass to card-games; here you find many correspondences with the first group, but many common features drop out, and others appear. When we pass next to ballgames, much that is common is retained, but much is lost.—Are they all 'amusing'? Compare chess with noughts and crosses. Or is there always winning and losing, or competition between players? Think of patience. In ball games there is winning and losing; but when a child throws his ball at the wall and catches it again, this feature has disappeared. Look at the parts played by skill and luck; and at the difference between skill in chess and skill in tennis. Think now of games like ring-a-ring-a-roses; here is the element of amusement, but how many other characteristic features have disappeared! And we can go through the many, many other groups of games in the same way; can see how similarities crop up and disappear. And the result of this examination is: we see a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities of detail (Witttgenstein, 1953, §66).

Similarly, in the case of business – and its purpose – there may be no defining characteristics common to all kinds. This is because they vary widely in terms of size, industry, structure, goals, and practices. Ed Freeman recently suggested as much (Freeman & Sollars, 2022) and while interviewed (Ledecky, 2021), stating:

> What makes something a business? You know, it's really hard to say. It's not just profits, there are lots of other forms of business. So you can't treat them all alike because they're not. And that's what the old story does: it treats them all alike and pretends that money is the only thing that matters, and of course that's just not true (2021). 'Business' is perhaps a family resemblance idea, so that there are a multitude of different kinds of business, and perhaps a host of different ways to run an ethical business. What many of these ideas may have in common is some shared sense that whatever the business does, it needs to be responsible for the effects of its actions on its stakeholders (2022).

Indeed, businesses operate in vastly different markets with varying operational norms extending across numerous distinctive sectors including retail, human services, design, manufacturing, finance, and privatized civil service. Some of these entities share certain features, such as a consumer clientele, while others serve other businesses or governments. Some require human resource management, while others are individually operated or outsource such tasks to other businesses. Still others may have legacies of social impact engagement resulting from particular industries and stakeholder niches, while others may have none. Furthermore, some are privately owned, others are family owned with potential legacy commitments, while others yet are publicly traded and thus bound by varying fiduciary interests. As a result, it would seem that no essential definition can unify the myriad aims of every kind of business – unlike law and medicine.

And as Freeman underscores, falling back on 'profit' cannot on its own satisfy a purposeful definition. First, non-profits are also run like businesses, and even nominally for-profit businesses may not turn a profit either – we can think of myriad sorts of vanity stores or legacy enterprises upholding an individual or shared vision, which may be sustained by additional funding either from their owners or crowdsourced from far flung admirers. Second, as many scholars since Aristotle have observed, the conceptual disconnect between practices like law and medicine and mere profit-seeking turns on a distinction between means and ends (Donaldson & Walsh, 2015; Friedland & Jain, 2020). While the former are widely considered *ends* in themselves, the pursuit of profit is but an instrumental *means* to further ends. It is therefore understandable that respondents typically struggle to complete the purposeful analogy between business, law, and medicine. However, if we replaced business with, say, "as military is to (defense)" or "as university is to (knowledge)," there is little hesitation, as was confirmed in our own classroom experiment. This is because such practices are also *intrinsically* – as opposed to *instrumentally* valuable. Accordingly, none of these activities are known as lacking for internal normative discourse concerning them. Conversely, business is inherently transactional. But, of course, neither can this quality suffice as a strictly empirical definition since many non-business activities, such as games and political diplomacy, are also transactional.

Despite such variability, the fact that we still manage to hold agreement on which activities count as business might best be described anthropologically by what Wittgenstein calls *form of life* – or *lebensform* in German. As such, business is an activity so fundamental to being human that it grounds meaning itself, like the activities of counting, measuring, playing, singing, or laughing, which we grasp directly, viscerally, allowing for mutual understanding and associated linguistic conventions (Wittgenstein, 1953, §240-42). This is in line with Adam Smith's grounding business activity on the basic propensity of humans to truck, barter, and exchange one thing for another, which he takes as “common to all men, and to be found in no other race of animals, which seem to know neither this nor any other species of contracts” (Smith, 2008, p. 18). Indeed, there is evidence that humanity has engaged in trade since the very beginning. As early as 320,000 years ago, humans in East Africa had already begun trading with distant groups, using color pigments and manufacturing more sophisticated tools than those of the Early Stone Age (Smithsonian, 2018). And trade-like practices are echoed in the list of human universals compiled by anthropologist Donald Brown, which include play, exchange, division of labor, cooperation, and reciprocity (Brown, 2004). Naturally, there will be countless variations of such practices, each with their own motives, purposes, and intents, determined by contextual conditions of life. These determine what Wittgenstein calls *language games*:

> But how many kinds of sentence are there? Say assertion, question, and command? – There are countless kinds: countless different kinds of use of what we call 'symbols', 'words', 'sentences'. And this multiplicity is not something fixed, given once for all; but new types of language, new *language-games*, as we may say, come into existence, and others become obsolete and get forgotten. (We can get a rough picture of this from the changes in mathematics.) Here the term "language-game" is meant to bring into prominence the fact that the speaking of language is part of an activity, or of a *form of life* (Wittgenstein, 1953, §23).

As Wittgenstein later puts it in one of his most cited remarks:

> If language is to be a means of communication there must be agreement not only in definitions but also (queer as this may sound) in judgments. This seems to abolish logic,

> but does not do so. – It is one thing to describe methods of measurement, and another to obtain and state results of measurement. But what we call 'measuring' is partly determined by a certain constancy in results of measurement (Wittgenstein, 1953, §242).

Similarly, it is one thing to describe methods of business, and another to obtain and state results of business. But what we call 'business' is partly determined by a certain constancy in results of business activity, just as it is with what we call 'game'. And those results will vary depending on the norms of the business – or gaming – activity as determined by myriad facts of living which distinguish, say, a family-run business with close community ties from a global financial firm. We must therefore confront the possibility that the words 'business' and 'business purpose' just like the words 'game' and 'game objective' – have so many different forms that no single attribute – or set of attributes – is sufficient to denote them all.

If so, the general definition of business – and its purpose – provided by Donaldson and Walsh, namely 'optimized collective value' within "a system of production, exchange, and distribution relationships among and between the entities that constitute firms' value chains" (2015, p. 188) will also be inadequate to a fully apposite extension. While 'optimized collective value' may still be useful to a limited or idealized extent, one might reasonably argue that plenty of organizations which count as business in usual parlance have no such aims. Indeed, many systems of production, exchange, and distribution produce little if any collective value to speak of. Perhaps the most conspicuous examples are pyramid schemes, which inevitably collapse, and lotteries, gambling platforms, and derivatives markets through which actors compete against one another in zero-sum games. Though Donaldson and Walsh would exclude these as examples of legitimate businesses on their account, many such markets do find success often by upholding reliable norms of good business which attract and retain participants. They might even engage in socially responsible activities, such as funding state parks, as does the Colorado Lottery (Gorman, 2024), or other philanthropies, as does the popular DraftKings betting platform (DraftKings Inc.), or information sharing, as with derivatives (Lanchester, 2024). As such, they all arguably qualify as legitimate forms of business, that, were they to shift to a truly optimal pursuit of collective value, would alter the nature of their activities to an unrecognizable extent. As a result, business – and its purpose – seem to qualify as family resemblance concepts, the same way the concept of game – and its objective – escape any essential defining characteristics.[1]

It may well be that no concise purposive definition of business is possible – the conviction that one could exist being merely a projection of philosophical expectations. We are caught in a 'picture of reality' as Wittgenstein would say. But once we are showed the way out of the fly-bottle – as he liked to put it – we are left with a fuller understanding. In this case, we come to see how the family resemblance nature of the practice makes it difficult, if not ultimately futile, to seek a purposive theory of business across all instances. As such, the various purposes of business function as their own normative language games, which like other games, are rule-based interactions that convey various context-specific forms of meaning turning on implicit motives, purposes, and intents, as in the way 'good' can be used either as a description, an approbation, or an expression of satisfaction. Normative meanings are thereby conveyed – and shared – not by atomistic mapping of words to objects, but by their use in the operational context of the game, 'in the wild' as it were. By participating in language games, we learn and adapt to language, which is necessary for apprehending the attitudes and dispositions of others, as well as better understanding our own. Hence the starting point of philosophical reflection is not one's own mind, but one's

[1] An upshot here is that this would not keep businesses devoid of any clear social purpose from continuing that way. While we might hope that such entities would gradually shift direction – and our conception indeed allows for it – it is not our aim in this paper to offer a moral argument for why they should.

participation in communal activities which provide outward criteria for inner processes (Wittgenstein, 1953, §580).

The Corporate Purpose Paradigm

Accordingly, there has been substantial communal activity over the last generation toward more socially responsible business practices such as environment, social, and governance (ESG) reporting and corporate purpose statements, which characteristically share a family resemblance variability, much the same way as socially entrepreneurial aims (Lancastre, Lages & Santos, 2024). This movement has been championed as a means of confronting grand challenges facing society, namely, climate change, inequality, pollution, and global health (Kaplan, 2023), and policymakers and politicians have followed suit. New EU rules, for example, require large companies and listed companies to publish regular reports on the social and environmental risks they face, and on how their activities impact people and the environment (European Commission, 2023). Until recently, social purpose language was rarely if ever included in the finer grained strategic components of traditional corporate mission statements, which, historically, were used to explain the nature of a business, its customers, and objectives. Most large companies developed such statements as part of the strategic management process, whereby executives set goals that coordinate the outputs of various units within a firm to be aligned and take advantage of economic opportunities leading to successful organizational outcomes. In this way, mission statements informed stakeholders on the various ways in which companies produced value. Such statements have been institutionalized over the years as a best practice in the business toolkit, allowing companies to establish goals and revise them in turbulent times to respond to shocks from economic, social, or political tumult. While traditional mission statements are tools that facilitate goal setting, they are not very useful to answer more existential questions that executives and their constituencies may raise on whether their companies stand for any higher purpose toward making the world a better place (Mackey & Sisodia, 2014). Enter corporate purpose statements, which can help companies respond to such questions from a branding perspective.

Corporate purpose statements depart from the traditional logic used in the strategic planning process which generated mission statements. Instead, they are established to inform company agents and stakeholders of the social outcomes the company fosters, thereby appealing positively to their moral self-image. In so doing, they have started to replace traditional mission statements altogether, so that the mission statement becomes avowedly purposeful, and mission and purpose become synonymous. Such statements strive to instill positive emotions in constituents such as pride, inspiration, and interest in the company (Bailey, Tilley & Sandoghdar, 2023). They communicate human values and ethical frameworks to characterize the way the company goes about doing business in an edifying way. Here are some typical examples across various business sectors from major corporations (Purpose Brand LLC, 2024) to family enterprises (Fit Small Business, 2025), along with their varied foci illustrating the family resemblance nature of such visions:

• Intel Corporation (semiconductors): "To create world-changing technology that enriches the lives of every person on earth." This emphasizes global consumer responsibility.
• Tom's (shoe company): "To provide shoes to children in need with every pair purchased." This emphasizes global concern for the most vulnerable.
• Procter & Gamble (consumer goods): "We will provide branded products and services of superior quality and value that improve the lives of the world’s consumers, now and for generations to come." This emphasizes global responsibility toward future generations.

• Sony (entertainment technology): "To be a company that inspires and fulfills your curiosity." This emphasizes personal edification.
• Recreational Equipment Inc. (outdoor equipment): "To inspire a lifelong love of the outdoors through education, outfitting, and stewardship." This emphasizes sustainability in both learning and practice.
• Ventana Surfboards & Supplies (family-owned beach recreation goods): “To be the most environmentally responsible surf company on the planet.” This expresses a totalizing commitment to environmental responsibility.
• Shanti Yoga + Wellness (family-owned yoga studio): “We empower people in all bodies to take care of their health by providing practices that tame stress, reduce anxiety and cultivate peace.” This expresses an inclusive approach toward improving physical and emotional well-being.

By aspiring to such higher purposes, companies seek to attract like-minded agents to collaborate toward achieving increasingly optimal realization of shared goals. This trend is reinforced by the growing demands of a digital economy, requiring coordination among a wider array of stakeholders to better motivate customers and weather public crises (Henisz, 2023). Indeed, there has been substantial research of late defending the importance of stakeholder engagement for managing through such visions, particularly Cohen (2023) who argues for reorienting stakeholder theory around explicit moral logics, and cautioning against increasing reliance on artificial intelligence, which may have a dystopic dehumanizing effect (Erkal & Vandekerckhove 2024). Such calls fit into a wider literature on grounding corporate purpose, spurred by the onset of grand societal challenges (Occasio, Kraatz & Chandler, 2023). For example, Suddaby, Manelly, and Fan argue (2023) that such trends mark the dawning of a new era “in which we no longer judge corporate behavior based on standards of legitimacy but rather on standards of authenticity." If, in fact, such trends are ongoing, we believe that the widespread implementation of AI copilots in the workplace provides promising opportunities for assisting social-purpose driven businesses in anchoring their missions across their organizations. Indeed, evidence is mounting that such tools offer a wealth of analytical power and communicative capacity which can benefit organizational actors in several ways: First, by making more information available to decision-making; second, by helping managers to better understand root causes of certain problems; third, by tracking assumptions, biases, constraints and trends; fourth, by facilitating 'what if' scenarios; and fifth, by better tracking of environmental factors and footprints (Kerzner & Farrow, 2023). These kinds of functional improvements stem largely from LLM technology's discursive or 'dialogical' nature, which can be leveraged to hone purpose commitments among stakeholders.

AI Copilots as Normative Dialogists

As previously discussed, normative dialogues can be understood as Wittgensteinian language games, or *Sprachspiel* – and copilots are ready and willing dialogists, currently being integrated across a wide array of organizational platforms. By engaging copilots in normative language games, users may expand their moral imaginations and challenge their own preconceptions, potentially uncovering ethical quandaries and potential solutions otherwise unnoticed (Werhane, 2020). Furthermore, if life-affirming alternatives to the instrumentalist neoliberal narrative are needed at this moment, as Waddock (2022) has argued, AI copilots may be well-disposed to help propel more edifying self-conceptions. Moreover, Mills and Sætra (2025) argue that AI copilots could offer underrepresented groups means to challenge their exclusion from decision-making processes by making stakeholder input (even if synthetic) easily available, and communicable to entrenched decisionmakers in an amenable language and style. They see it therefore as likely to become a natural part of best practice.

At the same time, the term ‘copilot’ may connote a degree of capability that could be misleading, as compared to ‘assistant’ or ‘support’. In airplanes, copilots are qualified to fly in the pilot's absence, and so the cachet of competence implied by the term subtly invites employees to trust in and abide by AI-driven output. Users should thus remain heedful to the fact that such technology does not exercise judgment itself but only reflects the aggregate judgments of others. Users are themselves fully responsible for their own normative judgments, and it is crucial that they understand this. For such technology can also enable greater managerial control and efficiency at the cost of declining ethical competence in the workforce (Erkal & Vandekerckhove 2024). Given this threat, designers and managers may want to consider installing reflective speed bumps to remind users that they are ultimately the ones making the normative judgments (Friedland, Balkin & Myrseth, 2024).

AI copilots have value, therefore, first and foremost as imperfect substitutes for competent human associates – and there are Wittgensteinian reasons to expect that the connectionist paradigm on which they are based will never reach full linguistic mastery (Friedland, 2005). However, competent human associates can be relatively scarce. While most of us don’t have easy access to a competent human ethics coach, we nearly all have access to copilots. Furthermore, unlike human dialogists, with limited experience and reference points, AI copilots dispose of massive databases through which to consider alternate viewpoints to help agents reach informed decisions. Indeed, LLM-based copilots have already been shown to stimulate increased critical reflection by acting as sparring partners, spurring executives to have better conversations (Lange & Parra-Moyano, 2025).

At present, though copilots can carry on a conversation about any topic at length, they do not yet delve proactively to find out more about the context or specific concerns of the user.

Still, when encouraged to do so, some discursive quality will arise, and users can encourage this pattern in their own interactions. They can even be used to create virtual boards of directors modeled after the personas of prominent historic figures and business leaders, always available to challenge users in wise and unexpected ways (Gupta, 2025). In cases turning on organizational agents' sense of business purpose, users can prod copilots to apply theoretical framing to gain a richer and finer-grained understanding of the stakes at hand. For example, when prompting copilots with a potentially ethically problematic innovation to a customer satisfaction measuring tool, say, a feature that rewards customers for positive ratings, copilots can be capable of effectively articulating alternative viewpoints informed by contrasting ethical frames such as virtue theory, utilitarianism, and deontology. Moral theory establishes these as canonically distinct approaches concerning character, collective wellbeing, and moral duty, respectively. By helping to discursively effectuate such "what if" scenarios, copilots can be beneficial to carrying out normative thought experiments in ways that can teach users how to apply those conceptual tools themselves in apt contexts. Gradually, agents might develop a practical proficiency for knowing when one moral frame might be better suited than another for articulating and resolving certain kinds of dilemmas in line with their organization's shared sense of purpose.

Anchoring Social Purpose Through AI Copilot Design

Since AI copilots have already been shown to stimulate increased critical reflection as sparring partners (Lange & Parra-Moyano, 2025), such platforms could be similarly designed to help agents identify and manage through ESG reporting targets. For instance, workplace copilots can help workers assess their carbon footprints as well as set personal goals and track their progress toward achievement (Carlsson et al., 2021), thereby providing agents with opportunities to develop practical wisdom or *phronesis* (Frémeaux & Voegtlin, 2023;

Aristotle, 2012) and self-confirm their positive moral self-image (Friedland, 2019). Such habitual day-to-day activities could reinforce a sense of shared purpose in the corporate culture, eventually inspiring ESG-reporting companies without explicit purpose statements to begin conceptualizing and articulating visions of their own. And for businesses which already have articulated purpose statements, these could be anchored through AI copilot design by ensuring that those systems align with the core values and mission of the organization, given the dizzying array of often vaguely specified social goals and values. For example, ethical AI design might involve creating systems that are transparent, fair, and accountable to build stakeholder trust, as does Microsoft's stated approach, emphasizing the importance of responsible AI practices, including safeguarding data privacy, mitigating algorithmic bias, and maintaining transparency (Briggs, 2024). Ethical AI copilot design can also help realize corporate purpose aims by promoting inclusivity and accessibility, as AI systems empathetic and considerate of diverse user needs can help businesses to serve broader clienteles. As Donaldson (2025) argues, adaptability to multipolarity including Hindu and Confucian moral frameworks and vocabularies is becoming increasingly important, and LLM-based tools will need to attend to different groups, cultures, and ways of separating right from wrong.

Nudging versus Boosting

Social purpose-driven organizations looking to hone their aims and avoid mission drift (Bruder, 2025) might be aided by seeking active, deliberative engagement with AI copilots as normative dialogists. Drawing them into Socratic dialogues could help uncover new facts, new perspectives, and overlooked solutions. In so doing, the motivational distinction between behavioral *nudging* which harnesses fast thinking (Thaler, 2021; Kahneman, 2011) and cognitive *boosting* which harnesses slow thinking (Hertwig & Grüne-Yanoff, 2017) is of central importance. This is because corporate-purpose architects may be tempted to manage reactive behavioral responses (nudges) rather than stimulate reflective cognitive engagements (boosts), which can prove counterproductive and potentially shift employees from deliberative engagement and discovery to mindless reaction and reactance (Friedland, Balkin, & Myrseth, 2024).

Still, limited reliance on behavioral nudges may be complementary to cognitive boosting, and checking mechanisms can be introduced to maintain critical self-reflection at key inflection points. Applications can be designed to help maintain – and even build – reflective moral self-awareness to guard against the tendency of cognitive skills to atrophy from disuse (Friedland, Myrseth & Balkin, 2023) and help agents reify their own idealized moral identities (Aquino & Reed, 2002) in alignment with their organizational purpose. More effective copilots could also be designed to periodically remind users to consider the possibility that their own impressions may not be entirely accurate, thereby helping them to navigate around known AI blind spots, including insensitivity to context, bias by presumption, limited logical coherence, and hallucinations (Hannigan, McCarthy, & Spicer, 2024).

Conclusion

By leveraging LLM-enabled organizational tools, social-purpose driven companies might better hone and navigate their normative commitments. And given that businesses vary widely in terms of sectors, values, culture, and procedural norms, the advantage of such tools is that they can be tailored to clarify and reify organizational goals while ensuring that users remain in control, avoiding one-size-fits-all applications (Friedman & Beavers, 2023). AI copilots can thereby help reinforce purpose commitments organically according to the particular language games which characterize different organizations and brand identities. As such implementations become increasingly commonplace across organizations, we might find that discussions of normativity and purpose become more functionally integrated within the contextualized activities of business practice.

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