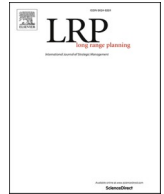




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Bridging corporate purpose and strategic renewal: A review and future research agenda

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ABSTRACT

There is growing interest in the strategic role of corporate purpose in processes of strategic renewal, but existing research appears fragmented and offers mixed insights. Some evidence suggests that purpose-driven organizations might be more flexible in navigating change and better able to radically reinvent themselves. Other studies emphasize the path-dependent nature of corporate purpose, conceiving it as a conservative force leading to inertia. Despite the substantial endorsement of the connection between corporate purpose and strategic renewal by practitioners, research lags behind in fully understanding and explaining the role of corporate purpose in strategic renewal processes. This disconnect reflects a broader issue of limited knowledge cumulativity, as fragmented research streams have so far impeded the development of an integrated understanding of these phenomena. To address this issue, this study develops a systematic literature review to identify the links between corporate purpose and strategic renewal across diverse research streams. Building on this analysis, using a design-oriented approach, we organize a research agenda of the purpose-strategic renewal nexus, bridging different and sometimes divergent streams of literature and outlining opportunities to contribute to theoretical advancements across diverse theoretical traditions and empirical contexts. The proposed research agenda is organized around three main objectives: *testing and elaborating*, *contextualizing*, and *theorizing* the relationship between corporate purpose and strategic renewal.

1. Introduction

A long-standing question within strategic management centers on how incumbent organizations can ensure long-term survival and sustained competitive advantage (Baden-Fuller and Volberda, 1997). This issue lies at the core of the research stream on strategic renewal (Agarwal and Helfat, 2009), which focuses on the activities and processes a company implements to reverse its path dependence and maintain alignment with its environment (Schmitt et al., 2016, 2018; Kwee et al., 2011; Agarwal and Helfat, 2009; Volberda et al., 2001a). Unprecedented grand challenges, disruptive technologies, and changing expectations of customers, markets, and employees have further reinforced this imperative for companies, driving strong scholarly interest toward understanding the drivers of strategic renewal.

However, somewhat surprisingly, this stream of work has largely overlooked the role of corporate purpose, defined as “a unifying

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reason to exist that gives meaning to the organization by providing valued ends to society and/or to the company's stakeholders" (Almandoz, 2023, p. 139). This is a surprising omission, because corporations today are increasingly called to reconsider their reason for being (Hollensbe et al., 2014; George et al., 2023; Ocasio et al., 2023) and are urged to expand the company's focus from short-term results to something more meaningful than just growth and profits (Lee et al., 2023). Despite the substantial endorsement of the connection between corporate purpose and strategic renewal by the business press (e.g., Business Roundtable, 2019; Fink, 2018), consulting firms, and practitioners (Durand, 2023), research lags behind in fully understanding and explaining the role of corporate purpose in strategic renewal processes. Indeed, while the concept of purpose is foundational in management research (Barnard, 1938; Selznick, 1957) and strategic management (Andrews, 1987), only recently have academics begun to shift their attention to how this concept can affect managerial practice and what its implications are for organizations' performance.

Existing research on the relationship between strategic renewal and corporate purpose appears fragmented and provides mixed insights. Some evidence points to purpose-driven organizations as being more flexible in navigating change and better able to radically reinvent themselves. Indeed, recent studies suggest that corporate purpose can enable unique strategies (Rindova and Martins, 2023), modify organizational conditions to foster architectural innovation (Henderson, 2021a), and allow corporations to embark on change initiatives (Henderson, 2020, 2021c; Gartenberg et al., 2019). Anecdotal evidence from strategic renewal cases seems to reinforce this perspective, suggesting that a new focus on the distinctive purpose of the company, whether it implies a new purpose or imbuing the existing one with new meanings, could support the initiation and effectiveness of strategic renewal processes (Henderson, 2021c; Gulati, 2022). For example, Gulati et al. (2022) reported that Singapore-based DBS Bank went through three waves of purpose-driven transformation. These efforts fundamentally reshaped the bank's systems, improved employee skills, and reprioritized customer focus, with the bank's purpose becoming bolder with each milestone achieved ("to be the best bank for a better world"). Similarly, Huy and Duke (2022) described how CEO Satya Nadella fought significant inertial forces threatening Microsoft's survival by realigning the entire organization around a new purpose ("to empower every person and organization on the planet to achieve more"). This shift justified refocusing Microsoft as a service company based on cloud computing. Collectively, these examples show that the link between corporate purpose and strategic renewal is becoming increasingly intriguing for the advancement of scholarly knowledge and is of utmost relevance for practitioners. The 2025 letter from BlackRock's Chairman and CEO further illustrates how the notion of corporate purpose has become embedded within broader strategic imperatives. Rising economic anxiety and structural shifts driven by AI, private markets, and infrastructure compel companies and markets to evolve by creating long-term value and by emphasizing adaptation, participation in growth, and the development of more inclusive economic systems (Fink, 2025), objectives that implicitly reflect the evolving meaning of corporate purpose.

However, as corporate purpose can be understood as related to the idiographic, historically rooted, value-laden reason for being of the organization (Almandoz, 2023; Kraatz and Flores, 2015), there is an opposing perspective that refers to corporate purpose as a fundamental constraint for renewing companies. This view tends to characterize purpose as a source of resistance and inertia, ultimately acting as an opposing force to change and leading companies toward path dependence. This tension limits our current understanding of the role of purpose in strategic renewal processes and, more broadly, how corporate purpose research could intersect with that of strategic renewal to unpack this relationship. This disconnect also reflects a broader issue of limited knowledge cumulativeness, as fragmented literatures have so far impeded the development of an integrated understanding of the dynamics between these two evolving organizational phenomena. This scenario calls for a more systematic examination of the relationship between corporate purpose and strategic renewal, to establish a coherent framework that can organize existing knowledge and guide future research, enabling knowledge accumulation in this field. Stemming from these arguments, two main research questions emerge: *how and to what extent has the relationship between corporate purpose and strategic renewal been examined in existing research? What are the research priorities and questions that can guide future studies towards knowledge accumulation?*

This study builds on a systematic literature review to address the current wave of interest in corporate purpose in the context of strategic renewal processes, paving the way for a more systematic exploration of these issues and their integration in the strategic renewal literature. By taking stock of past literature, this study identifies the reasons hindering the integration of these two research streams, highlights current contradictory views regarding the purpose-renewal relationship, and explores how they can be transformed into paths for future research. Given the conflicting arguments and current ambiguity around the relationship between corporate purpose and strategic renewal, we refrain from making a prediction about the nature and direction of this relationship. Instead, we explicitly position our study as a design-oriented and exploratory theoretical exercise. Consequently, our approach to this review is intentionally "generative" (using the terminology of Krlev et al., 2025), seeking to assemble knowledge across different scholarly traditions and generate a map to orient and guide future research. Through this process, we aim to open, envision, and expand new pathways that transcend the boundaries of prior research, fostering a more nuanced understanding of this complex interplay. Specifically, by examining the intersection of corporate purpose and strategic renewal literature, our study provides an integrative research agenda organized around three main objectives: *testing and elaborating*, *contextualizing*, and *theorizing* the relationship between corporate purpose and strategic renewal. The outcomes of our analysis underscore the speculative and generative nature of our conceptual experiment (Sismondo, 2011). Rather than presenting an empirically validated framework, the proposed directions aim to stimulate future empirical investigation and inspire further theoretical development aimed at explanation (Niiniluoto, 2001).

Accordingly, our work makes three contributions. First, this paper delineates the intersection between corporate purpose and strategic renewal—a relationship that has been largely acknowledged through anecdotal evidence but remains under-theorized and fraught with tensions and contradictory views. To address this, we offer a systematic framework that not only challenges conventional silos but also integrates disparate streams of research and proposes a coherent research agenda. Second, corporate purpose has generally been conceptualized as a stable, inertia-inducing construct. We reconceptualize it as a dynamic and multifaceted construct capable of both breaking entrenched path dependencies and catalyzing new strategic directions. By framing corporate purpose as

“path-breaking” and “path-creating”, we stimulate a theoretical dialogue that questions the static view of purpose. This framing invites scholars to explore its role in facilitating strategic renewal, for example by altering attentional structures, mitigating managerial myopia, and facilitating cognitive shifts within organizations. Third, by incorporating corporate purpose into the strategic renewal stream, we introduce a novel lens that accentuates the internal, human-centric, and intangible mechanisms driving renewal processes. While traditional studies predominantly focus on environmental pressures and market dynamics, this research foregrounds how internal motivational and cognitive factors—mediated by corporate purpose—shape the renewal of mental frames and organizational capabilities.

2. Review method

2.1. Boundary conditions of the review

Before delving into the data collection, we conducted a planning phase to define the boundaries of the key concepts of interest and then identify keywords suitable for a systematic literature search to capture a comprehensive sample of publications. To provide greater clarity regarding our conceptualization and interpretation of the concepts of corporate purpose and strategic renewal at the foundational step of our review, we draw on Suddaby's (2010) four-step framework on construct clarity. We adopt the definition of corporate purpose advanced by Almandoz (2023), which describes purpose as “a unifying (Warriner, 1965) reason to exist (Lepisto, 2015; Cardona and Rey, 2022) that gives meaning (Bartlett and Ghoshal, 1994) to the organization by providing valued ends (Lepisto, 2015) to society (Rey et al., 2019) and/or to the company's stakeholders (Fontán et al., 2019)” (p. 139). We conceptually and theoretically discern between the “purpose of the corporation” or “corporate objective” (i.e., the purpose of the corporate legal form compared to other organizational forms, such as benefit corporations or *société à mission*) and “corporate purpose” (“the purpose of a corporation”), which refers to the distinctive purpose of an individual corporation that enables it to differentiate itself from competitors in the market (Almandoz, 2023; Ocasio et al., 2023). In this review, we adopt this latter perspective. Strategic renewal, on the other hand, is defined as “the process, content, and outcome of refreshment or replacement of attributes of an organization that have the potential to substantially affect its long-term prospects” (Agarwal and Helfat, 2009, p. 3).

Next, we set scope conditions of the two constructs under study. We understand corporate purpose as organizational phenomenon embedded in cultural environments, we focus solely on incumbent for-profit firms (thus excluding non-profits), and we relax the assumption of the pro-social character of corporate purpose as a necessary requirement. Our approach embraces a perspective of strategic renewal that spans diverse empirical contexts and levels of analysis. It is also important to elaborate on the logical connection to other related constructs. The construct of corporate purpose is related to, but conceptually distinct from, several well-established concepts in academic research, including vision, mission, corporate social responsibility (CSR), organizational culture, and identity.¹ The distinctions between purpose and these constructs are increasingly acknowledged, and corporate purpose is progressively being recognized as a stand-alone construct in its own right. On the other hand, the concept of strategic renewal is very broad in nature and is often used interchangeably with related terms such as strategic change, corporate entrepreneurship, and strategy process (see Schmitt et al., 2016 for a detailed explanation of how these concepts are different).

To address this conceptual pluralism but still retain focus on the concept, in our review, we adopt a deliberately broad definition of strategic renewal, proposed by Agarwal and Helfat (2009). According to the authors, this definition emphasizes the refreshment or replacement of organizational attributes that affect long-term prospects but still distinguishes strategic renewal from strategic change more generally. Importantly, it does not specify the precise content, process, or outcomes of renewal, allowing flexibility based on contextual relevance. Consequently, this conceptualization allows multiple pathways and approaches to renewal, and does not require the assumption of success of renewal efforts.

To select keywords for the search (see Fig. 1), we analyzed prior literature reviews on both corporate purpose (Brosch, 2023; George et al., 2023; Jasinenko and Steuber, 2023) and strategic renewal (Schmitt et al., 2018; Hernández-Linares and Arias-Abelaira, 2022). Consistently with our points above, as our aim was to focus on a core perspective of corporate purpose, we avoided using keywords associated with adjacent concepts such as vision, mission, intent, goals, CSR, sustainability, and business ethics. The same decision was applied to the strategic renewal stream; therefore, adjacent concepts (such as corporate entrepreneurship or strategic change) were not included as keywords. Analyzing past literature reviews of the two research streams also helped clarify the specific aims of our study. Unlike previous reviews that have examined these topics in isolation, our approach bridges these two streams to uncover novel theoretical and empirical connections with a knowledge accumulation logic. Table 1 provides a summary of previous literature reviews.

To maintain coherence with our conceptualization of purpose and renewal, we also established a boundary condition during data collection, focusing exclusively on established companies, and excluding start-ups and nascent entrepreneurial ventures. This is because the challenges related to corporate purpose and strategic renewal are more pronounced within established firms (e.g., Volberda et al., 2001a; Kwee et al., 2011; Schmitt et al., 2018).

¹ For a detailed explanation of how these constructs differ from corporate purpose, see George et al. (2023) and Brosch (2024).

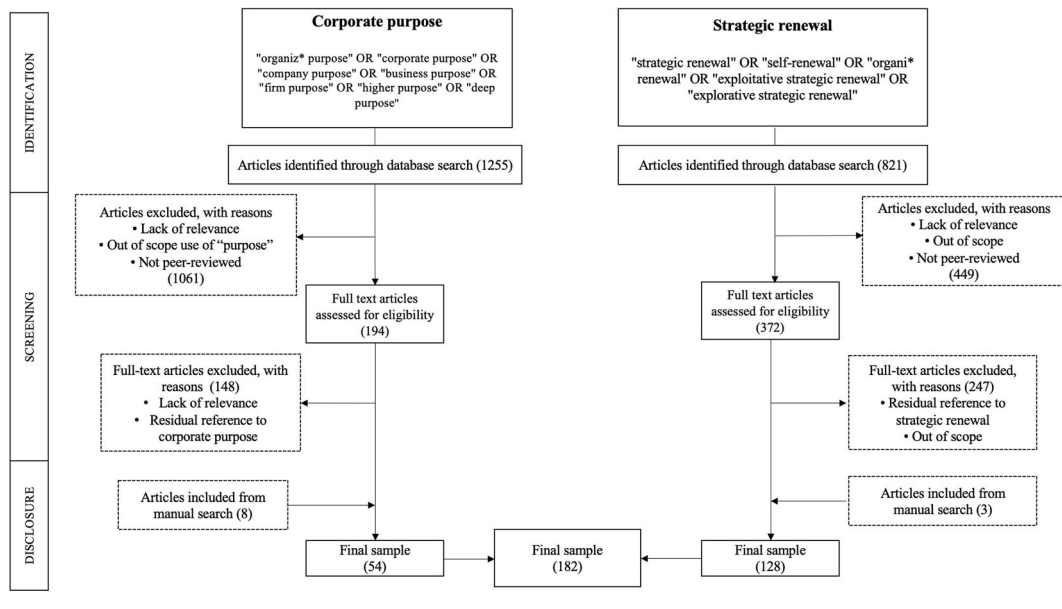


Fig. 1. Overview of the studies selection process.

2.2. Data collection

We then used the Scopus database, one of the largest and most comprehensive academic databases, to conduct two parallel searches.² The selected subject areas were Economics, Econometrics, and Finance; Business, Management, and Accounting; Social Sciences; and Arts and Humanities. This comprehensive list of subject areas reflects the multidisciplinary nature of the subjects under study. Retrieved contributions were eligible for inclusion only if written in English. The search led to 1255 results. From these, an initial assessment of eligibility based on title and abstract was conducted using exclusion fit criteria (e.g., lack of relevance; use of “purpose” as a synonym for business objectives) and quality criteria (i.e., non-peer-reviewed, thus excluding conference proceedings, books, book series, abstracts, and editorials). Since assessing the title and abstract is often insufficient to understand the fit of a research article with the aim of the review, a second eligibility assessment was performed on the full text of the remaining articles, excluding studies based on fit criteria (e.g., purpose as marginal references; out-of-scope contributions). The electronic database search was additionally supplemented by a manual search of high-quality journals to ensure that no relevant studies were missed, leading to the inclusion of eight additional articles.

A similar process was conducted for the strategic renewal stream. The initial search resulted in 821 publications. The first assessment of eligibility based on title and abstract, through the application of exclusion fit criteria (e.g., lack of relevance; out of scope) and quality criteria (i.e., non-peer-reviewed, thus excluding conference proceedings, books, abstracts, and editorials) resulted in the exclusion of 449 studies. A second assessment of eligibility was then performed, excluding articles based on fit criteria (e.g., lack of relevance, out-of-scope contributions). Similarly, the electronic database search was supplemented by a manual search to include three seminal contributions, not captured in the initial retrieval. Fig. 1 presents an overview of the study selection process.

2.3. Data analysis

After consolidating the final sample of articles included in the review (i.e., 182 articles), we began an in-depth phase of data analysis. This involved an initial step where we conducted separate analyses for studies focusing on corporate purpose and those centered on strategic renewal. Each article was coded according to descriptive categories, including study type (i.e., conceptual or empirical), article focus, theoretical lenses, methodological approach (i.e., quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods), main findings, theoretical and managerial contributions, and limitations. This initial phase provided a comprehensive understanding of the two bodies of literature, laying the groundwork for the next phase of the analysis. In the second phase, we evaluated the level of integration between corporate purpose and strategic renewal research. This helped uncover the reasons behind the limited convergence of these two research streams and the emergence of contradictory perspectives regarding the role of corporate purpose in strategic renewal processes. This sequential process allowed us to structure a research agenda, informed by the logic of knowledge accumulation. We did so by identifying key objectives for future research aimed at clarifying and deepening the relationship between corporate purpose and

² The search process ended in September 2023.

Table 1
Past literature reviews on corporate purpose and strategic renewal.

Authors and year	Title	Focus and scope	Approach	Output of the review
George et al. (2023)	Purpose in the For-Profit Firm: A Review and Framework for Management Research	The authors review literature streams (mission statement, vision, strategic intent, values, service, stewardship) that invoke purpose in the for-profit firm and propose a unifying definition.	Narrative literature review	The authors introduce a definition of corporate purpose that encompasses a twofold perspective (duty-based and goal-based) and develop a framework to study purpose that decouples its framing and formalization within firms from its realization.
Brosch (2023)	Corporate purpose: from a 'Tower of Babel' phenomenon towards construct clarity	The author reviews and synthesizes the literature on corporate purpose to achieve construct clarity.	Systematic literature review (138 sources comprising scientific papers, books, book chapters, practitioner oriented journals, and reports)	The author proposes a definition of corporate purpose, highlighting seven core characteristics. The study delineates the scope conditions and the relationship of corporate purpose with related concepts (e. g., mission, vision) and summarizes the coherence of these constructs.
Jasinenko & Steuber (2023)	Perceived Organizational Purpose: Systematic Literature Review, Construct Definition, Measurement, and Potential Employee Outcomes	The authors introduce and define the multidimensional construct of Perceived Organizational Purpose based on a systematic literature review.	Systematic literature review (44 sources comprising scientific papers, books, book chapters, practitioner oriented journals)	The authors develop and validate a four-dimensional scale of Perceived Organizational Purpose, testing the relationship between Perceived Organizational Purpose and the adjacent yet differentiated concept of meaningful work.
Schmitt et al. (2018)	Strategic Renewal: Past Research, Theoretical Tensions, and Future Challenges	The authors systematically review various literature streams on strategic renewal to provide a more integrative perspective.	Systematic literature review (95 sources comprising scientific papers)	The authors identify three key theoretical tensions of strategic renewal research (learning vs. resource, induced vs. autonomous, and co-alignment vs. co-creation). As such, the authors define strategic renewal's conceptual core, identify gaps in the past literature, and provide guidance for future research.
Hernández-Linares & Arias-Abelaira (2022)	Adapt or Perish! A Systematic Review of the Literature on Strategic Renewal and the Family Firm	The authors examine the current state of strategic renewal research in family businesses.	Systematic literature review (21 sources comprising scientific papers and book chapters)	The authors identify the main research gaps and develop a path for future research.

strategic renewal, specifically: *testing and elaborating*, *contextualizing*, and *theorizing*. Accordingly, we draw on our sampled studies to provide evidence of the potential mechanisms, contextual factors, and theoretical concepts that could inform future research.

3. Review findings

3.1. The status quo of corporate purpose literature

The final sample of articles on corporate purpose comprises 54 contributions, published between 1965 and 2023 (see Table A in the Appendix for a summary of selected corporate purpose research). Our sample includes 38 publications that examined corporate purpose theoretically and 16 articles that explored it empirically. Regarding conceptual papers, four draw on case examples (e.g., Stone and Heany, 1984; Birkinshaw et al., 2014; Durand, 2023), three were review articles (George et al., 2023; Brosch, 2023; Jones-Khosla and Gomes, 2023), and one develops a theoretical model (Song et al., 2023). The empirical papers applied different methodologies, including qualitative and quantitative research designs as well as mixed methods.

Although corporate purpose has been investigated in management discourse since the 1930s (e.g., Barnard, 1938; Selznick, 1948), it is only recently that it has regained traction among management scholars. The distribution of studies within our sample confirms this renewed attention on corporate purpose (see Fig. A in the Appendix). However, as contributions have increased, the fragmentation of this emerging field has grown proportionately (Lee et al., 2023). Emerging research reveals multiple perspectives on the nature of corporate purpose. For instance, George et al. (2023) defined corporate purpose from two distinct perspectives. From a goal-based perspective, purpose is seen as an organizational objective defined and chosen by the firm itself, without necessarily recognizing the wider role of corporations in society as moral actors. From a duty-based perspective, purpose reflects a broader set of societal values and expectations, incorporating ethical and/or moral positions.

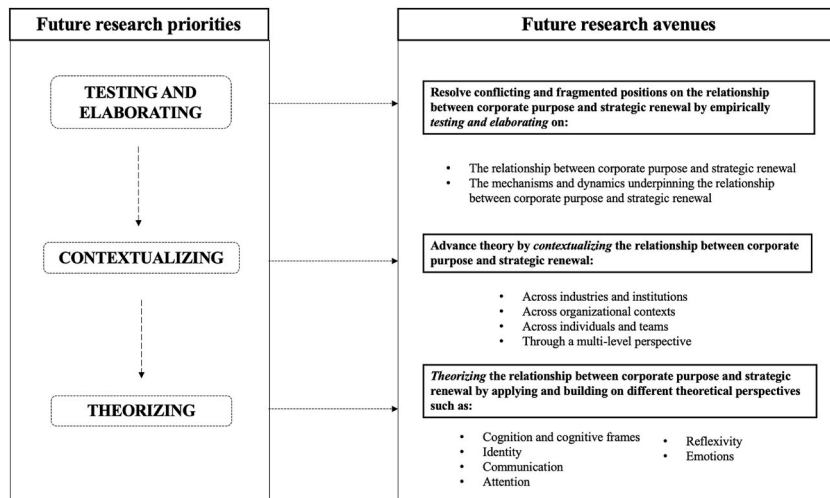


Fig. 2. Advancing research on the relationship between corporate purpose and strategic renewal: future research priorities and avenues.

Almandoz (2023) argued that, as academic discourse evolves, research on corporate purpose can be divided into two distinct but interconnected conversations, which he framed as inside-out and outside-in perspectives. According to the author, the inside-out perspective presents purpose as a cultural and subjective phenomenon, which provides meaning and motivation to individuals within the organization. The outside-in perspective, by contrast, interprets the concept of purpose through the lens of the unpredictable scenarios that characterize our society, shaped by stakeholders pressures and discourses regarding societal impact, environmental sustainability, and activism (Almandoz, 2023; Besharov and Mitzinneck, 2023; Durand and Gouvard, 2022), reflecting a systemic and impact-oriented stance. According to the author, these two perspectives may be interconnected. An outside-in purpose might evolve into an inside-out purpose, but it must be noted that a company's corporate purpose does not necessarily have to be aligned with societal ideals (Ocasio et al., 2023; Almandoz, 2023). Importantly, in discussing this categorization, Almandoz (2023) suggested that "an important question for researchers would be how to integrate inside-out and outside-in purposes, as well as whether combining both types of purposes affects their benefits and risks." He adds: "those two forms of purpose may interact positively, achieving higher societal alignment and identification with the organization (Pratt, 1998)" (p. 145).

Another common thread across the sample is the effort to distinguish corporate purpose from adjacent concepts (Moore, 2012). George et al. (2023) presented a list of managerial concepts (i.e., mission statement, vision, strategic intent, values, service, stewardship) which, although they inform our understanding of purpose, are conceptually different (see also Brosch, 2023). Gartenberg and Serafeim (2022) also presented purpose as distinct from other constructs, such as culture, identity, values, and stakeholder orientation (see also Pratt and Hedden, 2023). This trend evidently underscores an increasing effort to conceptualize corporate purpose as a stand-alone construct (Gartenberg et al., 2019; Hollensbe et al., 2014; Mayer, 2021).

Our sample also revealed the emergence of studies that explicitly embrace a more strategic perspective on corporate purpose. For instance, Rindova and Martins (2023) advanced a conceptualization of purpose that stems from the moral imagination of strategists and becomes a firm-level logic of action, able to orient the firm's actions and determine how it contributes to the well-being of both the company and its stakeholders. Similarly, Aguilera (2023) argued that effectively activating corporate purpose as a strategic asset through corporate governance can yield immediate organizational gains while safeguarding long-term stability.

Lee et al. (2023) argue that corporate purpose has taken root more firmly than other business approaches that have remained peripheral to organizations, because it helps mitigate the volatility and uncertainty that characterize today's business environment. Drawing on the attention-based view, according to which organizations have limited attentional resources (Dutton and Dukerich, 1991; March, 1994; Ocasio, 1997), the authors suggest that purpose combats the phenomenon of attentional myopia (Lee et al., 2023). This condition implies that organizations become less able to identify possible threats or opportunities (Lee et al., 2023; Levinthal and Posen, 2007; Catino, 2013) thereby slowing their ability to respond and adapt (Walrave et al., 2011). Thus, although the strategic implications of purpose are beginning to emerge, with both practical and theoretical ramifications, the intersection of purpose and strategy certainly remains open to further study and theoretical advancement.

3.2. The evolving landscape of strategic renewal research

The final sample of articles on strategic renewal consists of 128 contributions, ranging from 1969 to 2023 (see Table B in the Appendix for a summary of selected strategic renewal research). Our sample comprises 33 publications that analyzed strategic renewal theoretically and 95 articles that explored it empirically. The distribution (see Fig. B in the Appendix) between qualitative (42 articles) and quantitative (47 articles) studies is relatively balanced, with six additional studies that adopted mixed methods. The number of publications recorded confirms strategic renewal as a prevalent theme in management studies (Baden-Fuller and Volberda, 1997). After years of steady growth in terms of publications and a balance between theoretical (strongest in the early years) and empirical

research, recent trends show a marked increase in empirical publications, demonstrating the maturity of the research field (Edmondson and Mcmanus, 2007).

The wide application of the concept of strategic renewal within the academic communities and the different theoretical perspectives adopted has led to fuzziness in concept development (Agarwal and Helfat, 2009; Schmitt et al., 2018). Within our sample, some studies emphasize the cognitive element of renewal (e.g., Barr et al., 1992; Romme, 1994) while others adopt a perspective on strategic renewal that is tightly coupled with the concept of corporate entrepreneurship (Huang, 2009; Glaser et al., 2015; Moretti et al., 2020; Fang et al., 2021). Other studies conceptualize renewal as a form of strategic change (Pettit and Crossan, 2020; Lischka, 2019). Most remaining studies draw on two primary definitions. The first describes strategic renewal as “the activities a firm undertakes to alter its path dependence” (Volberda et al., 2001a, p. 160). The second defines it as “the process, content, and outcome of refreshment or replacement of attributes of an organization that has the potential to substantially affect its long-term prospects” (Agarwal and Helfat, 2009, p. 3). A third noteworthy definition extends the theoretical breadth of the concept and adopts a processual perspective, defining renewal as “the process that allows organizations to alter their path dependence by transforming their strategic intent and capabilities” (Schmitt et al., 2018, p. 5).

Many empirical publications within our sample focused on the antecedents of strategic renewal. Endogenous antecedents may include individual- and organizational-level sources of renewal, such as social capital (e.g., Khan et al., 2020a, 2020b), leaders' characteristics (e.g., Chen and Nadkarni, 2017), top managers' mental maps or corporate governance orientation (Barr et al., 1992; Kwee et al., 2011), occupational identity (e.g., Brusoni and Rosenkranz, 2014; Pettit and Crossan, 2020), resource allocation (e.g., Albert et al., 2015; An et al., 2018), or organizational culture (e.g., Ferguson-Amores et al., 2005). Exogenous antecedents in our sample include environmental scarcity (Schmitt et al., 2016), environmental pressures (Volberda et al., 2001a), technological shifts (Eggers, 2016), or increased competition (Huygens et al., 2001).

A smaller subset of studies focused on the processes and outcomes of renewal activities. Regarding the initiation and implementation of strategic renewal processes, Schmitt et al. (2018) identify two main perspectives, with studies that focus on senior executives as those designated to create and implement strategic renewal initiatives (e.g., Hurst et al., 1989; Whitney, 1996) while others that attribute this responsibility to lower-level employees and managers (e.g., Floyd and Lane, 2000; Taraki et al., 2018). Concerning the results that enterprises achieve through strategic renewal efforts, our sample mentioned factors such as increased performance (e.g., Dodd et al., 2014), corporate longevity (e.g., Nguyen et al., 2022) and business model innovation (Warner and Wäger, 2019; Micheli et al., 2020).

3.3. Exploring the integration between corporate purpose and strategic renewal research streams

In conjunction with the analysis of the two strands of literature, we sought to understand the level of integration between them. To do this, we examined references to strategic renewal within the corporate purpose literature and vice versa. When present, references to strategic renewal in corporate purpose research were often filtered through arguments focused on managerial cognition and attention (e.g., Crilly and Sloan, 2012; Kaplan, 2008a, 2008b; Stone and Heany, 1984). While only one study explicitly referenced strategic renewal (Clegg et al., 2021), some have indirectly informed the concept by addressing architectural innovation and ambidexterity, i.e., the balance between exploration and exploitation activities (March, 1991), which, as Volberda et al. (2001b) explain, can be seen as “renewal actions that either elaborate on the current range of activities or add new activities to the current repertoire of the organization” (p. 214) (e.g., Adler and Heckscher, 2018; Henderson, 2021a, 2021b).

Collectively, these studies suggest that corporate purpose helps orient organizations during uncertain times and enhances their awareness of the need for change. These findings resonate with numerous real-world examples of organizations attributing their successful strategic reconfigurations, business model transformations, and overall directional shifts to a newly (re)discovered sense of corporate purpose. However, these contributions reflect a relatively narrow or instrumental view of corporate purpose, largely treating it as an empirical manifestation of identity or values. Such an approach risks overlooking contrasting explanations, theoretical complexities, or unintended consequences. As research on corporate purpose matures and begins to consolidate into a more coherent research field, such assumptions may be insufficient. A more critical and comprehensive perspective is therefore essential to capture the multifaceted ways in which purpose interacts with complex organizational processes such as strategic renewal, beyond just asserting its positive influence.

Conversely, existing references to corporate purpose in strategic renewal research primarily center on the idea that the renewal process begins with the creation of a strong sense of purpose (Haggerty, 1969; Nonaka, 1988). This sense of purpose can help both organizational members and top managers work more effectively (e.g., Simons, 1994; Dougherty, 1992; Volberda et al., 2001a) and balance exploration and exploitation activities. Additionally, some studies emphasized the role of top management teams (TMTs) and leaders in setting, translating into action, and communicating a corporate purpose throughout the organization (e.g., Post et al., 2022; Al Humaidan and Sabatier, 2017; Bartlett and Ghoshal, 1994). This result once again provides a partial perspective on how purpose might intersect with strategic renewal processes. It primarily highlights the role of leadership in defining and disseminating corporate purpose within a renewing organization. However, it does not consider, for example, how different forms of purpose may interact with various dimensions and outcomes of renewal. Moreover, such insights are often suggested rather than systematically examined, underscoring the need for more rigorous empirical research.

Considering the limited integration observed in past contributions on the relationship between strategic renewal and corporate purpose, we turned to examine the underlying reasons for this result. One explanation lies in the conceptual dominance of strategic intent within the strategic renewal literature. Indeed, although seminal strategic renewal contributions have acknowledged the importance of corporate purpose for renewal processes (e.g., Haggerty, 1969; Nonaka, 1988), it seems that within the strategic renewal

research tradition, corporate purpose has historically been tightly coupled with the concept of strategic intent. Strategic renewal has often been framed as an ongoing effort to maintain alignment between a firm's strategic intent and its capabilities (Ravasi and Lojacono, 2005). While strategic intent and corporate purpose share some features, they differ significantly in scope and orientation.

Strategic intent may function as a rhetorical device that "creates consistency and purpose by redefining the urgency and certainty of certain activities, such that everyone in the organization can see and believe in the firm's overarching agenda" (George et al., 2023, p. 5), yet it primarily focuses on outperforming competitors and attaining market leadership (Hamel and Prahalad, 1989), without explicitly addressing broader societal concerns (George et al., 2023). In short, it captures the essence of winning (Hamel and Prahalad, 1989). In contrast, corporate purpose encompasses a wider set of values and motivations, including a firm's societal contribution. It may be driven by a desire to align with societal needs or to sustain long-term legitimacy. This emerging distinction calls for a re-evaluation of longstanding assumptions in the strategic renewal literature. As contemporary managerial discourse increasingly invokes corporate purpose when discussing transformation and renewal, the distance between academic conceptualizations and managerial practice widens. This underscores the need to complement past research on the role of strategic intent within strategic renewal with studies that place corporate purpose more front and center.

Second, although anecdotal evidence largely portrays purpose as an enabling factor for strategic renewal, some perspectives argue that corporate purpose is deeply embedded in an organization's history, identity, values, and capabilities—elements that are inherently resistant to change and can render the organization "hostage to its own history" (Ocasio et al., 2023, p. 125). In contrast, strategic renewal is fundamentally linked to change, as it involves the "refreshment or replacement of attributes of an organization" (Agarwal and Helfat, 2009, p. 3). This divergence may explain why past studies have not fully integrated these two concepts. In short, there is still insufficient clarity on whether and under what conditions purpose can serve as an enabling or constraining force in strategic renewal processes, with existing literature presenting arguments both for and against each perspective. For instance, although it may seem counterintuitive to connect corporate purpose with strategic renewal, Ocasio et al. (2023) offer a perspective that challenges this assumption. They argue that while corporate purpose can be seen as an "ideal rooted in an organization's history, it is not static. Instead, it is subject to evolution and transformation over time" (p. 131). This dynamic quality enables substantial adaptation in response to change, underscoring the potential for corporate purpose to play a pivotal role in strategic renewal.

To further illustrate the ambiguity surrounding the role of purpose in renewal processes, it is useful to recall the two perspectives on corporate purpose – inside-out and outside-in outlined by Almandoz (2023). One might argue that only those organizations that explicitly commit to an "outside-in" purpose (positioning themselves as actors who go beyond mere profit maximization to pursue the common good of society and the environment) will ultimately be driven to change and renew themselves. This may occur because an outside-in purpose is more likely to shift in response to external pressures, evolving stakeholder requirements, or increased attention to pursuing valued goals. As the purpose evolves, organizations may need to adapt by initiating strategic renewal efforts. However, intuitively, similar mechanisms may also extend to companies that embrace an "inside-out" purpose. For instance, companies that lead with purpose may be more inclined to evolve to protect and honor that purpose, even when it is not explicitly pro-social. By definition, corporate purpose is aspirational, an objective that may never be fully realized. This aspirational nature implies that organizations, throughout their life cycle, are compelled to change, take risks, and revise fundamental aspects of their business models in pursuit of that purpose.

At the same time, both an outside-in and a strong inside-out purpose can act as constraints on renewal. An outside-in purpose may create "values-based conflicts and polarization" (Almandoz, 2023, p. 146), leaving organizations frozen in a state where change is hindered by competing logics (Battilana et al., 2022; Glynn, 2000). Similarly, organizations with a strong inside-out approach may resist change to avoid appearing unfaithful to their established purpose or may fail to recognize the need for change altogether. As such, while important, the underlying assumption that different types of corporate purpose may lead to distinct loci of strategic renewal remains largely unsubstantiated, as existing research has yet to thoroughly explore the complex dynamics between corporate purpose and strategic renewal.

4. Toward reconciliation and knowledge accumulation: a future research agenda

Building on the arguments presented, we regard further investigation into the intersection of corporate purpose and strategic renewal as vital to resolving existing contradictions and developing a more coherent understanding of how corporate purpose influences strategic renewal. Further analysis of the emerging findings from our review has enabled us to identify potential strategies for improving integration between the two domains. We have distilled these insights into a future research agenda organized around three key objectives, which we labeled: *testing and elaborating*, *contextualizing* and *theorizing* the relationship between corporate purpose and strategic renewal. These three objectives address distinct research problems that are currently hindering knowledge accumulation. Fig. 2 presents the overarching findings from our literature review.

The first and most urgent stream of work, which we believe can resolve outstanding confusion and controversy, and help guide a cohesive research stream in the future, centers on *testing and elaborating* the fundamental relationship between the two constructs of our study. This is important because existing empirical evidence remains limited and underdeveloped. Second, we call for research that advances theory by *contextualizing* the interplay between purpose and strategic renewal through examining the relationship across different contexts and levels of analysis. This is necessary as existing research is heavily skewed toward specific contexts and has yet to integrate multiple levels of analysis effectively. Finally, we offer guidance for *theorizing* the relationship between corporate purpose and strategic renewal, applying and stretching different theoretical perspectives from one field and the other, to reveal and explain the intricate dynamics connecting purpose to strategic renewal, ultimately bridging the two and advancing our understanding of both fields. This is crucial for enhancing the legitimacy of the purpose-renewal relationship and its relevance to broader debates.

It should be noted that our future research agenda does not aim to cover all aspects of corporate purpose and strategic renewal as separate fields. Instead, it seeks to establish a foundation for future research and offer a roadmap for scholars interested in exploring the intersection of these two research streams. For each of these areas, we first present guiding arguments that point to specific themes that future research should address. Then, we provide a more comprehensive list of potential research questions and expected contributions in [Tables 2–4](#).

4.1. Testing and elaborating the corporate purpose and strategic renewal relationship

Empirically testing the fundamental relationship between corporate purpose and strategic renewal emerges as the priority for resolving the existing conflicting and disjointed positions and claims in the academic literature and business discourse. First, our review reveals a lack of empirical studies examining the corporate purpose–strategic renewal relationship. We thus propose two fundamental future research directions concerning how organizations redefine purpose while pursuing renewal and how these processes interact.

4.1.1. The relationship between corporate purpose and strategic renewal

Our systematic literature review revealed a notable absence of research explicitly examining the intersection between corporate purpose and strategic renewal. This finding is particularly surprising given the abundance of anecdotal evidence from organizations that have strategically employed corporate purpose as a catalyst for renewal. In light of this discrepancy between practice and scholarship, we urge scholars working in this emerging domain to undertake foundational research aimed at determining whether a statistically significant relationship exists between corporate purpose and strategic renewal. At face value, this would offer evidence and theoretical explanations of whether and how such relationship may (or may not) hold. However, given the expanding scope of corporate purpose research, our review also indicates that future research should examine how different perspectives on corporate purpose affect strategic renewal processes. Drawing on the categorization of goal-based versus duty-based purpose ([George et al., 2023](#)), as well as inside-out versus outside-in perspectives ([Almandoz, 2023](#)), future research could investigate whether certain forms of corporate purpose are more conducive to strategic renewal or, conversely, under what conditions they might inhibit it.

Additionally, researchers should explore which specific characteristics of an organization’s purpose make it more or less likely to facilitate strategic renewal, and how these features can be intentionally managed. For instance, corporate purpose can vary in its

Table 2

Testing and elaborating the relationship between corporate purpose and strategic renewal.

Theme	Research questions	Expected contributions
The relationship between corporate purpose and strategic renewal	<p>RQ 1. Is there a statistically significant relationship between corporate purpose and strategic renewal, beyond existing anecdotal and qualitative evidence available so far?</p> <p>RQ 2. How do different types of corporate purpose (e.g., inside-out vs. outside-in, goal-based vs. duty-based, etc.) influence strategic renewal?</p> <p>RQ 3. How does corporate purpose influence different dimensions and outcomes of strategic renewal (e.g., incremental vs. radical renewal, top-down vs. bottom-up renewal, renewal trajectories, renewal capabilities, speed or success of renewal, survival, longevity, etc.)?</p> <p>RQ 4. Do positive and negative effects of corporate purpose and strategic renewal hold across diverse research settings?</p> <p>RQ 5. Is the relationship between corporate purpose and strategic renewal linear, or curvilinear?</p> <p>RQ 6. How do strategic renewal processes influence, in turn, the evolution of corporate purpose over time?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theory testing: provide reliable empirical tests of the corporate purpose-strategic renewal relationship and related mechanisms • Refine the measurement of key constructs and related dimensions of the corporate purpose-strategic renewal relationship(s) • Reveal intended or unintended effects of corporate purpose on strategic renewal
Mechanisms and dynamics underpinning the relationship between corporate purpose and strategic renewal	<p>RQ 7. What are the different mechanisms through which different types of corporate purpose (e.g., inside-out vs. outside-in, goal-based vs. duty-based, etc.) shape and influence strategic renewal processes and outcomes?</p> <p>RQ 8. What are the short-term vs. long-term, and ephemeral vs. persistent effects of changes in corporate purpose on strategic renewal processes and outcomes?</p> <p>RQ 9. How and why do leaders intentionally decide whether to keep, modify, or completely redefine their company’s purpose during strategic renewal processes?</p> <p>RQ 10. In what ways does a shifting corporate purpose help or hinder managers’ and employees’ buy-in during strategic renewal processes?</p> <p>RQ 11. What are the feedback mechanisms and dynamic loops that link strategic renewal processes to the evolution of corporate purpose over time?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theory building and elaborating: identify new critical mechanisms and patterns linking corporate purpose to strategic renewal • Reveal intended or unintended dynamics linking corporate purpose and strategic renewal

Table 3
Contextualizing the relationship between corporate purpose and strategic renewal.

Theme	Research questions	Expected contributions
Corporate purpose and strategic renewal across industries and institutions	<p>RQ 12. How do firms operating in contested industries reconcile the need to renew themselves with the challenges in convening an authentic adoption of corporate purpose?</p> <p>RQ 13. How do firms navigate different regulatory pressures in implementing corporate purpose throughout strategic renewal processes?</p> <p>RQ 14. How do (un)favorable social judgments of corporate purpose by external audiences influence the process and outcome of strategic renewal?</p> <p>RQ 15. How can firms in highly competitive environments leverage corporate purpose as a strategic asset for strategic renewal?</p> <p>RQ 16. How do global companies adapt their corporate purpose (statements) across different cultural and institutional contexts during processes of strategic renewal?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify macro-level boundary conditions shaping the corporate purpose - strategic renewal relationship(s) • Explore heterogeneity across industries, audiences and institutional contexts
Corporate purpose and strategic renewal across organizational contexts	<p>RQ 17. What role does organizational age play in shaping the flexibility or rigidity of purpose-driven renewal processes?</p> <p>RQ 18. How do large versus small organizations differ in effectively disseminating a shared corporate purpose to facilitate strategic renewal?</p> <p>RQ 19. How does corporate purpose influence strategic renewal across different ownership and governance structures (publicly traded, private equity, family-owned organizations)?</p> <p>RQ 20. To what extent do firms' existing or slack resources and capabilities shape the relationship between corporate purpose and strategic renewal?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify meso-level boundary conditions shaping the corporate purpose - strategic renewal relationship(s) • Explain heterogeneity across different organizations (in terms of size, age, ownership structure, governance, resource availability)
Corporate purpose and strategic renewal across individuals and team	<p>RQ 21. How do founders, CEOs' and TMTs' characteristics (e.g., leadership style, tenure, age, gender) influence the interpretation and adoption of corporate purpose during renewal processes?</p> <p>RQ 22. In what ways do teams' and employees' personal values and career aspirations shape their support for, or resistance to, purpose-driven renewal?</p> <p>RQ 23. How do managers' and employees' personal beliefs toward corporate purpose shape the success or failure of strategic renewal initiatives?</p> <p>RQ 24. How do managers' and employees' attitudes toward strategic renewal shape the perception of corporate purpose as a valuable asset for change?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify micro-level boundary conditions shaping the corporate purpose - strategic renewal relationship(s) • Explain heterogeneity across different managerial profiles (in terms of leadership style, tenure, age, and gender) and employee and team characteristics (personal values, career aspirations, generational differences, professional identities)
Corporate purpose and strategic renewal through a multi-level perspective	<p>RQ 25. How does the relationship between corporate purpose and strategic renewal unfold across different levels of analysis?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarify how the relationship between corporate purpose and strategic renewal evolves during the transition from one organizational level to another

breadth, in terms of content, scope, and target audience. Investigating how the specificity or inclusiveness of a purpose influences an organization's willingness and ability to initiate or resist renewal could yield valuable insights.

Other characteristics worth exploring include the level of abstraction (Wiesenfeld et al., 2017; Carton, 2018; Trope and Liberman, 2010) that defines a corporate purpose, for example, whether a more concrete purpose (e.g., tied to a specific product or market) versus a more abstract or idealistic one (e.g., centered on broader societal aspirations) provides greater flexibility for strategic renewal. Likewise, the degree of emotional resonance (i.e., how strongly the purpose connects with internal and external stakeholders) may shape an organization's commitment to embark on renewal initiatives. Furthermore, the level of ambition embedded in a purpose (e.g., modest versus bold) could significantly affect whether and how organizations pursue radical versus incremental renewal.

Depending on the intentionality behind the formulation and communication of corporate purpose (Durand, 2023), and the underlying moral philosophy on which a given purpose rests (deontological, consequentialist, or other normative foundation) its content and effects may differ significantly (Donaldson, 2021; Durand and Huynh, 2022). The ethical grounding of purpose not only shapes its substance but may also influence how it is interpreted and acted upon across organizational contexts during renewal efforts.

It could also be valuable to evaluate the effect of purpose in relation to strategic renewal by considering its level of sharedness both within and across different hierarchical levels. Indeed, the extent to which a corporate purpose is commonly understood and embraced throughout the organization (from top leadership to frontline employees) may significantly influence both the direction and effectiveness of strategic renewal. For instance, when examining within-level alignment, the literature on faultlines (Lau and Murnighan, 1998, 2005), which explores how groups may be divided into subgroups based on one or more salient attributes, could offer valuable insights into how such divisions (whether cognitive or demographic in nature) can hinder the development of a shared understanding

Table 4
Theorizing the relationship between corporate purpose and strategic renewal.

Theme	Research questions	Expected contributions
Cognition and cognitive frames	<p>RQ 26. What role does corporate purpose play in re-wiring cognitive frames during strategic renewal?</p> <p>RQ 27. Why and under which conditions purpose-driven companies are better able to engage in strategic renewal efforts?</p> <p>RQ 28. What cognitive processes underpin the adoption of a corporate purpose that is able to unify exploration and exploitation?</p> <p>RQ 29. How does the communication of a clear corporate purpose serve as a motivational frame during renewal?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate that corporate purpose, as a form of “motivational frame” shapes sense-making of the internal and external environment during strategic renewal processes
Identity	<p>RQ 30. How and under which conditions can corporate purpose mitigate the identity conflicts associated with managing exploratory and exploitative renewal actions?</p> <p>RQ 31. How does the redefinition of corporate purpose reshape organizational identity in incremental vs radical strategic renewal processes?</p> <p>RQ 32. How does a resonant corporate purpose facilitate managers’ capacity to imagine and shape future market structures?</p> <p>RQ 33. How do identity tensions emerge and get resolved when corporate purpose is deliberately redefined during strategic renewal processes?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand the role of identity and identity conflicts in shaping renewal dimensions and outcomes and analyze the interplay between identity and corporate purpose within organizations
Communication	<p>RQ 34. How do managers’ strategic vocabularies shape employees’ sensemaking of corporate purpose during renewal processes?</p> <p>RQ 35. What are the mechanisms by which top managers communicate corporate purpose as a lever for strategic renewal?</p> <p>RQ 36. How do employees’ perceptions of authenticity in corporate purpose communication affect their engagement in renewal initiatives?</p> <p>RQ 37. To what extent and why does vocabulary choice in purpose statements influence the tension between exploration and exploitation?</p> <p>RQ 38. How do organizations manage the risk of “purpose-washing” during renewal processes?</p> <p>RQ 39. What strategic vocabularies do leaders and organizational members use (or do not use) about purpose when guiding or participating in renewal journeys?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore the inherently communicative feature of corporate purpose during processes of strategic renewal and understand how strategic renewal actions are communicated differently when corporate purpose is involved and how this affects renewal outcomes
Attention	<p>RQ 40. How does corporate purpose shape top managers’ attention allocation between exploitation and exploration activities in strategic renewal?</p> <p>RQ 41. How can leaders sustain attentional engagement toward corporate purpose during strategic renewal processes?</p> <p>RQ 42. In what ways does corporate purpose succeed in sharpening the attention of managers and employees on the need for strategic renewal?</p> <p>RQ 43. Can corporate purpose divert managerial attention and become a distraction during strategic renewal processes?</p> <p>RQ 44. In what ways do leaders use corporate purpose narratives to direct and sustain employees’ attention toward strategic renewal?</p> <p>RQ 45. What are the long-term outcomes of sustained attentional engagement around corporate purpose for strategic renewal?</p> <p>RQ 46. How does a shared purpose influence the alignment of attention among top managers, middle managers, and frontline employees during strategic renewal?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unearth the attention mechanisms that bring corporate purpose at the forefront of managers’ and leaders’ agendas during renewal processes
Reflexivity	<p>RQ 47. How does reflexivity at different organizational levels (individual, team, organizational) interact to drive radical vs. incremental renewal activities?</p> <p>RQ 48. How do managers maintain reflexive practices over time, preventing corporate purpose from becoming a taken-for-granted assumption?</p> <p>RQ 49. What role do formal reflexive interventions (e.g., structured reflection sessions) play in successful purpose-driven renewal processes?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deepen the interface between top managers, middle managers, and employees through a more plural view of corporate purpose and strategic renewal processes
Emotions	<p>RQ 50. How do positive or negative emotions (e.g., excitement, hope, disillusionment) generated by a shared corporate purpose facilitate or impede strategic renewal?</p> <p>RQ 51. Which emotional mechanisms driven by corporate</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore how positive and negative emotions shape the view of corporate purpose for top managers and employees and its effects on the outcomes of strategic renewal processes

(continued on next page)

Table 4 (continued)

Theme	Research questions	Expected contributions
	purpose foster exploratory vs exploitative strategic renewal activities?	
	RQ 52. How does the intensity of emotional commitment to a newly articulated purpose affect long-term renewal success or failure?	
	RQ 53. In what ways does emotional overload constrain or derail purpose-driven strategic renewal efforts?	
	RQ 54. How do managers' emotional attitude when communicating purpose influence employees' behaviors during strategic renewal?	

of purpose and, consequently, affect renewal processes.

Moreover, future research could explore how the presence (or absence) of a clearly formalized corporate purpose influences the nature and outcomes of strategic renewal (Agarwal and Helfat, 2009; Angwin et al., 2015). Our literature review has shown how different dimensions of strategic renewal (e.g., incremental vs radical; top-down vs bottom-up) might be shaped in distinct ways by corporate purpose. For example, a well-defined purpose might help guide organizational members and foster alignment (Henderson, 2020), thereby facilitating more coordinated renewal efforts. Conversely, a highly formalized purpose might constrain experimentation or bottom-up renewal initiatives if it becomes overly rigid or prescriptive. It may also be valuable to investigate whether different patterns of renewal trajectories (see, for instance, Stienstra et al., 2004) influence how organizations adopt and operationalize corporate purpose.

4.1.2. Mechanisms and dynamics underpinning the relationship between corporate purpose and strategic renewal

By reviewing publications both within the corporate purpose literature and those that reference renewal and purpose, we observe that corporate purpose has predominantly been investigated as a static construct, and as a fixed overarching reason that guide renewal processes. While this is certainly true, our review shows that it is not the only case. Clegg et al. (2021) noted: "In a world that is in flux, fixed purposes can be too restrictive. The expressive organization as a mosaic of possibilities needs to reconsider purpose not as a fixed, unidimensional 'North Star', somewhere out here, but as an expansive idea intended to support adjustment to an ever-changing external environment" (p. 10). We concur with these insights and suggest that adopting a more dynamic perspective may offer valuable insights when conducting studies designed to test and elaborate on the relationship between corporate purpose and strategic renewal.

First, our review has brought to light that corporate purpose is far more dynamic than extant research has acknowledged. For instance, leaders and managers may rediscover (Gulati, 2022), graft (Kimsey et al., 2023) or defend a corporate purpose against drifts (Grimes et al., 2019). These coarse suggestions point to the necessity of considering purpose as a multifaceted and complex phenomenon, that can have ebbs and flows over time (Manelli et al., 2025). When corporate purpose is investigated from this perspective, the dynamic nature of purpose must be considered in relation to strategic renewal, as it may not always remain the same over time.

One useful starting point to account for this is the distinction proposed by Ocasio et al. (2023) of purpose as a "thing to be implemented" versus as an "aid to implementation of other plans". The distinction between the constitutive and supportive roles that purpose might have in strategic renewal processes should be explored by future research, providing a better understanding of the different effects that the choice of one role over the other entails. Strategic renewal can have deliberate first-order effects on the business model and the capabilities portfolio of the company. However, it may also yield second-order, unintended consequences on organizational culture, roles, and identity. Unpacking these two different types of change could provide greater clarity and theoretical precision in the nexus between corporate purpose and strategic renewal.

A dynamic view of purpose and renewal also requires unpacking the various forms of purpose at play at a given moment in time, along with the levels of analysis where purpose manifests and generates impact. Research on strategic renewal has already rejected the assumption of linearity, but still lags behind in addressing the role of paces (Ancona et al., 2001), rhythms (Zhang et al., 2023), and trajectories (Kunisch et al., 2017). Corporate purpose research has traditionally held the assumption of the stability of corporate purpose but is gradually shifting away from this rigid perspective. Purpose can be understood as a value-laden and meaningful *raison d'être* for organizational members (inside-out perspective), as an alternative to profit maximization, as a call for systemic change for the benefit of society and stakeholders (outside-in perspective), or as a written and communicated statement (e.g., Almandoz, 2023; Besharov and Mitzinneck, 2023). Although distinguishing between these forms may offer analytical clarity, in practice these perspectives are much more intertwined and often evolve over time. For instance, an organization may possess a strong sense of corporate purpose, without having a specific consideration of how stakeholders benefit from it (Ocasio et al., 2023). On the other hand, organizations can have a strong outside-in purpose, that may not motivate and be meaningful for employees (Almandoz, 2023). Therefore, future research should explore in greater depth how processes of purpose change intersect and align with strategic renewal processes.

One critical consequence of this line of reasoning, already highlighted by Ocasio et al. (2023), is the need to consider purpose and strategic renewal as two distinct but interconnected dynamic processes – namely "repurposing" and "strategic renewing". Processual accounts of organizational transformation would be extremely useful in this regard. Processes of "repurposing" and "strategic renewing" may occur in parallel, or sequentially. They can have parallel trajectories or intersecting trajectories, their interaction can lead to their mutual reinforcement or to the reversal of the other; one can also accelerate, stabilize, or decelerate the other. There might

be different configurations of these processes that lead to varied strategic renewal outcomes. Research in this area could help identify effective pathways for realizing strategic renewal while also attending to corporate purpose, a question that seems urgent for organizations and leaders alike.

Table 2 provides an overview of potential research questions and expected contributions related to the arguments described in this section.

4.2. Contextualizing the corporate purpose and strategic renewal relationship

The second part of our future research agenda seeks to explore the relationship between corporate purpose and strategic renewal within context, emphasizing the importance of heterogeneity across settings and levels of analysis. In the previous section, our primary focus was on testing and elaborating the direct relationship between corporate purpose and strategic renewal. Here, however, we shift our attention to the macro-, meso-, and micro-level boundary conditions that may shape the relationship. By examining these contextual factors, we can gain a more nuanced understanding of why the purpose–renewal link may vary across different organizational, industry, and cultural environments.

4.2.1. Corporate purpose and strategic renewal across industries and institutions

When exploring strategic renewal research in relation to corporate purpose, we argue that greater attention should be given to the industry- and country-specific starting conditions of firms embarking on renewal processes. Indeed, we believe it is somewhat simplistic to recommend that all organizations should engage in purpose-driven renewal activities in the same manner. For instance, enterprises operating within contested industries (e.g., alcohol, tobacco, chemicals, petroleum, or nuclear power) across different geographic areas, may face conflicting logics of renewal and purpose compared to organizations in less stigmatized industries, considering that they typically face problems of stigma and reputation from social audiences (Jackson et al., 2014; Hiatt et al., 2015).

Indeed, firms operating in contested industries are more likely to face an interesting paradox: while the strategic imperative of renewal is more intense for companies in those industries, since in the long run they will be divested, these companies will have a harder time credibly convincing multiple audiences of the integrity of the commitments derived from their corporate purpose. As such, the process of coupling the inside-out and outside-in purpose becomes a moving target. On one hand, explicitly not complying with the symbolic pressures of stakeholders may put these organizations at risk (Suddaby et al., 2023). On the other hand, adopting an outside-in (or prosocial) corporate purpose may not be viable for such organizations, since external stakeholders may not accept or recognize it as authentic. This tension introduces various unfavorable outcomes for organizations, such as “purpose-washing” (or “woke-washing”) where “a perceived mismatch between an organization’s reputation and their claims about purpose sparks skepticism from external stakeholders (Pratt and Hedden, 2023, p.6; Gulati and Wohlgezogen, 2023). As noted by Gulati and Wohlgezogen (2023) “the widespread use of prosocial themes and stories as an instrumental sales and marketing practice [may] fuels stakeholder suspicion that firms’ claims of purpose may be a smokescreen to conceal unchanged, unsustainable business practices” (p. 271).

Other unfavorable outcomes include symbolic management or decoupling (Westphal, 2023), or triggering stakeholder cynicism (Pratt and Hedden, 2023). Future research could investigate how negative social judgments by external audiences (Suddaby et al., 2023) influence the processes and outcome of strategic renewal, and how (favorable) judgments of authenticity regarding corporate purpose by employees and middle managers can serve as a counterbalancing force. A longitudinal research design would provide greater richness to this line of reasoning, allowing researchers to explore the extent to which social evaluations favor or hinder employee participation and buy-in to strategic renewal processes.

Future research on corporate purpose and strategic renewal should also account for the broader environmental context, particularly the regulatory landscape (e.g., Flier et al., 2001) and the level of competitive intensity (Yiu et al., 2007). These elements are central to the strategic renewal research tradition, and they become even more critical when introducing corporate purpose into the conversation. In highly restrictive or ambiguous regulatory environments, the scope of renewal initiatives may be constrained or complicated by compliance requirements. An important question for future research is whether, in such contexts, corporate purpose can help organizations address regulatory shortcomings and seize emergent opportunities or whether it may instead become a liability. Relatedly, it may also be important to understand how firms navigate the external pressure to adopt a corporate purpose (Durand and Gouvard, 2022; Durand, 2023) and how this influences strategic renewal processes.

Similarly, competitive intensity compels firms to differentiate themselves, prompting them to pursue new pathways for growth and transformation. Under such pressures, a well-defined corporate purpose may act as a strategic asset by mobilizing resources, aligning stakeholders, and sustaining renewal efforts. Future studies should also investigate how institutional contexts (e.g., Aguilera, 2023) shape the expression and reception of corporate purpose during renewal. For example, cultural norms and institutional arrangements may influence stakeholder expectations, affecting the legitimacy and impact of renewal initiatives. Another promising line of inquiry concerns how global firms translate and diffuse their purpose across subsidiaries and how this shapes renewal processes and outcomes.

4.2.2. Corporate purpose and strategic renewal across organizational contexts

Future research should explore how organizational size and age influence the interplay between corporate purpose and strategic renewal. Size is particularly salient because larger incumbent firms often possess multiple layers of hierarchy and complex structures (Baden-Fuller and Volberda, 1997). These layers may slow or dilute the diffusion of a shared corporate purpose, potentially hindering alignment across business units and functions. At the same time, codifying corporate purpose is arguably more important in large incumbent organizations (Selznick, 1948). Nevertheless, large firms are under heightened pressure to renew themselves strategically in order to remain competitive (Volberda et al., 2001a). While they have extensive resource pools that can be leveraged to drive

renewal processes, they are also more likely to suffer from organizational inertia, making it challenging to deviate from established routines. Organizational age likewise introduces critical dynamics. Older firms frequently accumulate entrenched practices and cultural norms that, on one hand, provide continuity and serve as anchors for corporate purpose. On the other hand, these same legacy elements may constrain strategic flexibility if they become overly rigid or disconnected from current market demands (Ocasio et al., 2023). Consequently, future studies should examine how age and size shape the relationship between corporate purpose and strategic renewal, as well as the specific mechanisms through which these organizational characteristics influence organizations' ability to initiate and sustain strategic renewal.

Our review also shows how ownership and governance structures may introduce priorities that either support or undermine how corporate purpose and strategic renewal interact. For instance, family-owned firms may emphasize long-term stability and legacy, fostering stronger commitments to a purpose that extends beyond short-term financial metrics. Although emerging research has started to explore these themes, both in the corporate purpose literature (e.g., Gartenberg & Serafeim, 2022) and in strategic renewal research explicitly conducted within the family firm context (e.g., Hernández-Linares and Arias Abelaira, 2022), more research is needed to examine how family ownership shapes the activation and role of purpose in renewal activities. Additional research should also address governance structures more broadly. As Aguilera (2023) notes, corporate governance, through its formal rules and informal norms "is the link that aligns a firm's corporate purpose and the fulfillment of its strategic and business projects" (p.198).

4.2.3. Corporate purpose and strategic renewal across individuals and team

We also call for further research that places individual characteristics at the forefront when examining the intersection of corporate purpose and strategic renewal, to better understand the micro-level mechanisms that underpin this relationship. This would entail a deeper investigation into managerial, employee, and team characteristics. Prior research on strategic renewal has predominantly focused on top management teams (TMTs) and organizational leaders, emphasizing their central role in driving change (e.g., Schmitt et al., 2016). Similarly, corporate purpose is often brought to life through the words and actions of leadership. As such, future studies should examine how leadership attributes, such as style, tenure, age, and gender, shape how corporate purpose is interpreted and enacted within organizations. These characteristics likely influence not only how the need for renewal is recognized in the first place but also how the process is guided (Post et al., 2022; Dodd et al., 2014).

Additional attention should also be given to founders and their stance on the relationship between purpose and strategic renewal. For for-profit firms, corporate purpose is often rooted in the inspirational values and commitments articulated by the company's founders (George et al., 2023). Founders' beliefs and ideals can leave a lasting imprint on the organization, often enduring well beyond their formal tenure (Baron et al., 1999). This raises important questions about how purpose evolves after the departure of the founder, and what internal or external factors contribute to its continuity or transformation over time.

It also calls for a deeper understanding of the characteristics of a founder's purpose that can be retained, reinterpreted, or even contested by subsequent leaders, processes that may either foster strategic renewal or entrench organizational inertia. Indeed, imprinting theory posits that founding conditions leave a durable mark on organizations, particularly during sensitive periods such as the founding phase (Stinchcombe, 1965; Marquis and Tilcsik, 2013). These early imprints often exhibit significant "stickiness" and resistance to change, explaining the persistence of routines and practices over time (Boeker, 1989; Ellis et al., 2017). However, existing research also suggests that imprinting does not necessarily lead to rigidity (Tripsas and Gavetti, 2000). For example, De Cuyper et al. (2020) introduced the concept of imprint coupling, whereby foundational imprints are leveraged as a source of legitimacy for organizational change. Through this process, firms can adapt while preserving core values, allowing purpose to function as an enabler of change.

This duality suggests that a founder-imprinted purpose, rather than being inherently constraining, may also serve as a resource for strategic renewal, depending on how it is interpreted, enacted, and institutionalized by different organizational actors. This dynamic becomes particularly salient in the context of family-owned businesses, where the founder's imprint is often especially strong and deeply ingrained, influencing the firm across generations (Erdogan et al., 2020; Marques et al., 2022). In such settings, it becomes crucial to understand how the founder's original sense of corporate purpose is preserved or redefined over time, and whether it acts as a catalyst or a constraint to strategic change throughout the organization's life cycle.

Finally, future research that aims to deepen the understanding of the relationship between corporate purpose and strategic renewal should also pay attention to employees' and teams' attributes. Characteristics such as personal values, generational differences, career aspirations, and professional identities (e.g., Brusoni and Rosenkranz, 2014; Pettit and Crossan, 2020) may shape how renewal journeys are supported or challenged, and how corporate purpose is internalized.

4.2.4. Corporate purpose and strategic renewal through a multi-level perspective

Creating new knowledge at the intersection of corporate purpose and strategic renewal also calls for more research that spans multiple levels of analysis. Prior studies have acknowledged that industry-, country-, and firm-specific factors influence strategic renewal in distinctive and complementary ways (Volberda et al., 2001b; Agarwal and Helfat, 2009; Kim and Pennings, 2009). However, most research in this area has overlooked the complex interactions between the internal and external environments. We suggest that integrating corporate purpose into strategic renewal research could provide a valuable foundation for developing a multi-level perspective on the relationship between the two constructs. Emerging scholarship on corporate purpose has already started to reveal novel organizational and strategic processes and outcomes that a perspective encompassing multiple levels of analysis can uncover (Durand and Gouvard, 2022; Pratt and Hedden, 2023). As such, we propose as a final direction that more research should explore the relationship between corporate purpose and strategic renewal by adopting a multi-level perspective.

Table 3 provides an overview of potential research questions and expected contributions related to the arguments discussed in this section.

4.3. Theorizing the corporate purpose and strategic renewal relationship

The final part of our future research agenda seeks to identify the theoretical perspectives that can bridge corporate purpose and strategic renewal research. Specifically, in the remainder of this section, we suggest several themes that emerged from the reviewed literature on which future research could focus. These include cognition, cognitive frames, attention, attentional (re)engagement, reflexivity, identity, communication, and emotions.

4.3.1. Cognition and cognitive frames

Several studies in our sample examined cognition as a critical driver of strategic renewal processes (e.g., Barr et al., 1992; Romme, 1994; Stienstra et al., 2004; Eggers and Kaplan, 2009). Our review emphasizes that cognition offers a promising theoretical bridge between corporate purpose and strategic renewal. This is because strategic renewal, conceived as a “continuous process of first and second order changes in cognitive map” (Barr et al., 1992, p.15), frequently requires a rewiring of the cognitive frames of managers and employees regarding the organization’s purpose, identity, products, key routines, capabilities, or categorical position in the market. Consequently, a fruitful direction for future research is to explore how redefining and disseminating an organization’s purpose can simultaneously facilitate path creation (and frame breaking) while at the same time retaining some degree of idealized continuity within the firm. In this sense, purpose can serve as an overarching frame that can hold together exploitation and exploration activities, thus avoiding the tension between them to result in the rejection of one by the other. Research at the intersection of cognition and strategy has suggested that managers’ paradoxical frames can help keep both exploration and exploitation alive within the company, in a state of constructive tension (Smith, 2014; Smith et al., 2011).

During processes of strategic renewal, the new meaning that corporate purpose provides can also be an important sensemaking cue that helps organizational members to support this reframing. Strategic renewal research has suggested that managers across hierarchical levels often face conflicting behavioral role expectations, as exploitative and exploratory behaviors are inherently contradictory (Floyd and Lane, 2000). The same line of research has suggested that this conundrum can be solved by designing appropriate (formal) control systems. However, a shared belief about the purpose of the company can act as an informal control mechanism. Having a clear and compelling purpose can provide a unifying framework for the organization, motivating and aligning both leaders and staff, and encouraging effective collaboration as the organization undergoes renewal. Applying a cognitive perspective allows scholars not only to conceptualize strategic renewal as a process of frame shifting and frame amplification but also to conceive of purpose as a form of “motivational frame” (Benford and Snow, 2000), which can be spread and communicated across the organization to drive renewal.

4.3.2. Identity

Another theoretical perspective that can help bridge corporate purpose and strategic renewal research is related to organizational identity. Provisional insights from this line of reasoning point to the reframing role that purpose has around the meaning of “who we are” and “what we do”. Strategic renewal, particularly in its more radical forms, inevitably involves a redefinition of the alignment between shared cognitive frames of the firm’s identity and its emerging capabilities, routines, and business models (Danneels, 2011; Eggers and Kaplan, 2013; Schmitt et al., 2018). In this context, the cues offered by a resonant corporate purpose can provide new pathways for interpreting and connecting with the future strategic trajectory of the company. As Schmitt et al. (2016) note, the challenge in strategic renewal lies not only in how managers perceive and interpret environmental stimuli but also in their ability to imagine future strategic directions that can shape market structures (Patvardhan and Ramachandran, 2020). Hence, when corporate purpose is deliberately redefined to support strategic renewal, organizations may be more likely to engage in radical rather than incremental strategic renewal processes, and to follow a co-creation rather than a co-alignment trajectory. To advance this line of inquiry, comparative, longitudinal case study designs would be especially valuable for observing change processes over time and across levels.

4.3.3. Communication

Our review also highlights communication as a promising lens through which to understand the interplay between corporate purpose and strategic renewal. For instance, Simons (1994) discussed how top managers use control systems as levers of strategic renewal, which include communicating new strategic agendas as well as reinforcing the basic values, purpose, and direction of the organization. Similarly, Agarwal and Helfat (2009), in discussing incremental strategic renewal activities within IBM, noted the company’s “clear commitment and communication of strategic intent by top management, along with processes for both the formulation of strategy and its implementation” (p. 288). Importantly, corporate purpose is characterized by a strong communicative element, to such an extent that it is difficult to even imagine the presence of a corporate purpose that is not conveyed or narrated. To date, much of the literature has focused on the communicative aspect of corporate purpose by exploring the crafting of purpose statements (Brühl and Falkheimer, 2023), as well as the drivers and consequences of its authentic or inauthentic social judgment (Gulati and Wohlgezogen, 2023; Durand and Gouvard, 2022). Other studies have adopted a more micro-lens to investigate leaders’ communication of purpose (Lepisto, 2022; Carton, 2018).

Given that corporate purpose has prominently entered the vocabulary of CEOs and managers and is often reflected in shareholder letters, public statements, and organizational reports (Rajan et al., 2023), an interesting research avenue would be to examine which strategic vocabularies organizational members use (or do not use) when talking about corporate purpose, particularly when guiding or participating in renewal journeys. Strategic vocabularies are defined as “systems of words and the meaning of these words, used by groups, organizations, and institutional fields in communication, thought, and action” (Ocasio et al., 2018 p. 160; Loewenstein et al., 2012) and they could reveal important mechanisms of meaning construction, framing, and legitimation. This perspective could also

improve our understanding of the fundamental characteristics of purpose as a communication device, including its clarity, ambiguity, and shareability. In doing so, we could avoid the assumption that all purposes are inherently equivalent and instead recognize that they may have distinctive characteristics that differentially influence specific organizational outcomes. The future development of this stream of research would be beneficial for research at the intersection of corporate purpose and strategic renewal because it creates an additional research stream alongside the “purpose-washing” theme, which has so far dominated the scholarly debate on communication and corporate purpose so far. Additionally, it would support the emerging research on employees’ engagement in strategic renewal processes, by examining how the communicative framing of purpose mobilizes participation and commitment across different levels of the organization.

4.3.4. Attention

Another recurrent theme in our sample relates to attention (e.g., [Simons, 1994](#); [Blomkvist et al., 2010](#); [Brunson and Rosenkranz, 2014](#); [Lee et al., 2023](#)). The strategy literature has extensively discussed how top management’s attention, and their resulting understanding of the environment, drives organizational actions ([Barr et al., 1992](#); [Andrews, 1987](#)). Depending on what managers choose to focus their attention on, organizations may cope more or less effectively with a changing environment, identify appropriate responses, and engage in strategic renewal ([Barr et al., 1992](#)). Our perspective on attention builds on insights from both the corporate purpose and strategic renewal literatures. For instance, [Ocasio et al. \(2023\)](#) highlighted how to better explain the emergence and the implementation of different forms of renewal, “a more dynamic approach to attention allocation is needed” (p. 156). Likewise, [Lee et al. \(2023\)](#) argued that the reason why corporate purpose seems to have taken root so firmly within managerial communities is due, in part, to its capacity to help organizations combat attentional myopia, defined as “the noticing, encoding, interpreting, and focusing of time and effort by organizational decision-makers on both issues and answers” ([Ocasio, 1997](#), p. 189). A clear and shared purpose, they argue, creates shared attention and helps maintain focus during challenging times.

Building on this foundation, we propose that focusing on attentional dynamics while conducting research at the intersection of corporate purpose and strategic renewal could be particularly fruitful. An attention-based view of the role of corporate purpose in strategic renewal processes could examine more specifically how to ensure that managers and employees use a shared purpose as a conduit for making sense of and perceiving external and internal stimuli. Purpose, conceived as a motivational frame ([Benford and Snow, 2000](#)), can shift the meaning that individuals attach to organizational processes and capabilities, broadening the selection and evaluation of new, exploratory capabilities. As a general theory of strategic adaptation, the attention-based view ([Ocasio, 1997](#)) could offer a micro-foundational explanations of the reasons why and the conditions under which purpose-driven companies are apparently better able at spotting novel opportunities associated with exploration and renewal initiatives aimed at adding new activities to the current repertoire of the organization ([Volberda et al., 2001b](#)).

Future research could delve into the underexplored attentional mechanisms that influence how corporate purpose supports strategic renewal. We suggest that attentional engagement, which is “the process of intentional, sustained allocation of cognitive resources to guide problem-solving, planning, sensemaking, and decision making” ([Ocasio, 2011](#), p. 1288) can serve strategic renewal through corporate purpose, as the latter can provide novel cues to make sense of the internal and external environment. For example, sustaining an ambidextrous organization that is simultaneously focused on exploitation and exploration activities might require attentional engagement from its top managers and middle managers to consider the two domains as synergistic rather than oppositional or mutually exclusive. Furthermore, in the case of “rediscoveries” of corporate purpose by strategic leaders, future research could also consider the study of attentional re-engagement: how do leaders bring to the attention of middle managers and employees a forgotten purpose? How can they sustain attentional engagement towards such purpose during strategic renewal processes?

4.3.5. Reflexivity

Another promising concept that can be connected to attentional engagement at the intersection of corporate purpose and strategic renewal is reflexivity ([Rink et al., 2022](#); [Hodgkinson and Healey, 2011](#)). Myopia and inertia often stem from taken-for-granted, implicit assumptions about what the firm is about – for example, the quality of new product development for Polaroid ([Tripsas and Gavetti, 2000](#)). Anecdotal evidence suggests that when a new corporate (inside-out) purpose is meaningfully communicated and disseminated within an organization, it can also triggers deep reflections about the meaning of individual tasks and the role of the company in society (e.g., “Why are we doing what we are doing? For whom?”). Such moments can prompt questioning of existing cognitive schemata regarding capabilities, routines, business models, and markets, highlighting the role of reflexivity during strategic renewal processes. Future research could examine the role of purpose-derived reflexivity in setting the strategic direction and identifying opportunities for exploration during renewal processes.

4.3.6. Emotions

Drawing on [Vuori and Huy \(2016\)](#), we also suggest that coupling the attention-based view of corporate purpose with the research stream of emotions may inform further studies at the intersection of strategic renewal and corporate purpose. Although long overlooked, the role on emotion in strategic management is increasingly recognized as an important area of research ([Brundin et al., 2021](#)). Prior studies have shown that emotions can significantly influence organizational members’ thinking and behavior related to strategy implementation, innovation processes ([Vuori and Huy, 2016](#); [Huy, 2011](#); [Huy et al., 2014](#)), renewal, and growth ([Huy, 2005](#)).³ In

³ [Huy \(2005\)](#) study was present in the initial retrieved articles but was not included in the review sample as from a books series source. However, we acknowledge this contribution here as relevant for the argument we advance.

parallel, we know that energy, excitement, and positive emotions are unleashed by a shared purpose, as employees connect with and imbue their day-to-day tasks with a broader meaning (Rosso et al., 2010; Pratt and Hedden, 2023; Alexiou et al., 2019), and these emotions are diffused through emotional contagion (Lepisto, 2015).

Raffaelli et al. (2019) suggest that affective frames of innovation (that is, the ways in which emotions and feelings influence the perception and interpretation of innovation), can support the adoption of exploratory innovation, particularly when connected to a largely recognized meaningful aspiration. At face value, this would suggest considering a shared purpose as an enabler of strategic renewal. However, affective dimensions in processes of purpose-driven strategic renewal could also create emotional overload in organizations, potentially leading to the unintended consequence of failing the renewal process. Renewed interest in emotion would also help strategic renewal research to focus more on the interface between top managers, middle managers, and employees, adopting a more plural view of renewal processes outside the boardroom. The focus on emotion could also deepen our understanding of (inside-out) purpose, adding a dimension which is emotionally laden both for top managers and employees.

Table 4 provides an overview of potential research questions and expected contributions related to the arguments described in this section.

5. Discussion and contributions

In the present study, we developed a research agenda structured around three main objectives: *testing and elaborating*, *contextualizing*, and *theorizing* the relationship between corporate purpose and strategic renewal. By advancing this agenda, we take a crucial step toward fostering a more rigorous and generative exploration of the purpose-renewal relationship, with an approach that is informed by past research yet open to alternative and innovative research pathways. Our future research agenda contributes to existing knowledge by synthesizing prior work and offering a clear path forward that supports knowledge accumulation on the relationship between corporate purpose and strategic renewal. It is structured in a way that encourages research activities that have different objectives and that will be able to generate both theory testing and theory elaboration contributions. As such, it offers an organized framework that outlines a structured path for the evolution of this emerging research stream.

5.1. Theoretical contributions

Our review intentionally embraces a design-oriented approach that privileges exploration over prescription. Our conceptual exercise is deliberately exploratory, embodying the principles of generative theorizing (Krlev et al., 2025). By adopting a speculative and generative stance (Sismondo, 2011), we focus on assembling and connecting diverse perspectives to offer an integrative agenda that envisions new directions rather than prescribing definitive answers in the study of corporate purpose and strategic renewal. As such, our study makes three main contributions to the literature.

First, we offer the first systematic investigation of the intersection between corporate purpose and strategic renewal. This is important because, despite numerous real-world examples and anecdotal evidence indicating a strong connection between these two phenomena, there is a surprising lack of research explicitly examining this relationship. This observation reveals a notable disconnect between theory and practice. Our study addresses this discrepancy by bringing coherence to the fragmented notion that corporate purpose influences strategic renewal processes—both as an enabler and a constraint. We present preliminary evidence supporting this relationship and systematically organize the limited existing research into a comprehensive agenda for future exploration. In doing so, we lay the groundwork for the development of a coherent field of study around this critical topic for organizations.

Second, we contribute to corporate purpose research by showing how and why corporate purpose matters for strategy (Rindova and Martins, 2023; Ocasio et al., 2023; McGahan, 2023; Andrews, 1987). Traditional views often treat corporate purpose as a relatively stable, overarching statement of intent or values, which can be seen as a barrier to change, ultimately leading organizations toward path dependence and inertia. Our review questions and challenges (Healey et al., 2023) the traditional perspective that views corporate purpose solely as a constraining force by showing how it can simultaneously break existing paths and create new ones, thereby influencing strategic renewal. Indeed, by definition renewal describes “the process that allows organizations to alter their path dependence by transforming their strategic intent and capabilities” (Schmitt et al., 2018, p. 5).

Following this line of reasoning, we propose that corporate purpose can be “path-breaking” (Sydow et al., 2009), or “path-creating” (Garud and Karnøe, 2001). We outline several explanations for why this might happen. For instance, we discuss how corporate purpose might facilitate adaptation to external or internal environments through an attention-based view, or how it can help organizations manage competing demands through cognitive processes and frames. By shaping attentional structures and engagement across the organization, corporate purpose can mitigate managerial and organizational myopia (Lee et al., 2023). Our synthesis and systematization of the literature will enable significant progress in addressing divergent views, conflicting positions, and existing contradictions regarding corporate purpose and its role in strategic renewal processes. By identifying coherent research priorities that call for different methodological designs, as well as deductive and inductive reasoning, we offer a structured path toward resolving these tensions. This will ultimately entail viewing corporate purpose as a dynamic and multifaceted phenomenon—one that can play different roles, assume varying content, and manifest at different points in time when interacting with strategic renewal processes.

Third, we contribute to strategic renewal research (Volberda et al., 2001a, 2001b; Kwee et al., 2011; Schmitt et al., 2018) by introducing a new element in this research tradition—corporate purpose—which allows us to uncover new mechanisms through which renewal processes unfold. This is important because, even though strategic renewal appears to be a mature stream of research, further integration of corporate purpose can revitalize it by highlighting unexplored, complex phenomena and opening up opportunities for theory testing and elaboration (Fisher and Aguinis, 2017). By emphasizing corporate purpose, we deepen the strategic renewal

conversation and shift attention towards internal human dynamics, highlighting how these factors shape both the motivation for and the execution of renewal processes. This focus complements prior research that has most extensively viewed renewal as a response to environmental or market changes, by offering instead a more holistic perspective. In response to the growing interest in the individual and behavioral dimensions of renewal and, more broadly, within organizational change and architectural innovation (Henderson, 2021a), our analysis proposes corporate purpose as a valuable concept for uncovering the internal, human-centric, and intangible mechanisms driving renewal processes. Thus, we contribute to the advancement of the field by offering a framework that emphasizes the significance of purpose in understanding and navigating the intangible drivers of and effects on strategic renewal.

5.2. Managerial contributions

Our findings may also be useful for practitioners, serving as a stimulus for companies and managers to critically and thoughtfully evaluate the adoption of corporate purpose and its unconditional application during renewal processes, whether in communication strategies, leadership models, or organizational practices. Instead of adopting purpose blindly, managers should carefully assess its potential implications for both ongoing and planned strategic renewal processes. Moreover, our proposed research questions can be seen as valuable prompts for reflection, encouraging more deliberate and informed managerial behaviors in navigating this rapidly emerging field. In other words, the research agenda provides actionable knowledge for practitioners, particularly leaders, consultants and strategists, who are interested in deepening their tools and frameworks for strategizing around corporate purpose during change processes.

5.3. Limitations

Like any research, our study has its limitations. First, our choice of keywords inevitably shaped the scope of the sample analyzed. While we selected keywords that best captured the concepts of purpose and renewal, we did not include related notions such as vision, mission, intent, goals, or strategic change. This choice maintained conceptual coherence and alignment with past literature reviews but may have excluded studies that could have offered additional insights. Moreover, given the fast-evolving nature of research on corporate purpose, newly published work could further enrich our findings. Future reviews might also integrate insights from adjacent disciplines, to develop a more rounded understanding of corporate purpose and strategic renewal.

Moreover, our review is exploratory in nature (Edmondson and McManus, 2007) and does not seek to identify causal relationships between purpose and renewal. The topic can be considered an emerging phenomenon (O'Mahony and Cohen, 2022), offering potential for meaningful theoretical contributions (Colquitt and Zapata-Phelan, 2007). However, due to the novelty of the phenomenon under investigation, which includes both relatively uncharted contexts and areas that are rapidly gaining scholarly attention, rigorous causal identification is currently challenging (O'Mahony and Cohen, 2022) and lies beyond the scope of this work. The aim of this work is to deepen the understanding of how corporate purpose and strategic renewal are connected, without making definitive predictions regarding the direction of the relationship or empirically testing it. Insights developed in the review aim to guide future research from theory building toward systematic testing.

Finally, our review reflects a field that has not yet reached maturity. As empirical research expands, the boundaries of this field are likely to broaden. Future studies may refine, challenge, or extend our findings, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of how corporate purpose and strategic renewal interact within organizations.

6. Conclusion

While the link between corporate purpose and strategic renewal is widely recognized by the business press, consulting firms, and practitioners, academic research on the role of purpose in strategic renewal processes remains fragmented and yields mixed insights. Anecdotal evidence suggests that strategic and organizational processes centered around corporate purpose can significantly shape how managers and organizations approach and execute strategic renewal. However, the fixed and path-dependent nature of corporate purpose may also act as a conservative force, generating strategic inertia and impeding renewal efforts. In this paper, we sought to address this tension by clarifying the existing and potential connections between corporate purpose and strategic renewal. Through a systematic literature review, we examined prior contributions to both fields, mapped the boundaries of these research streams, and analyzed the underlying reasons for their limited integration. Building on this analysis, we proposed a research agenda designed to guide future studies at the intersection of corporate purpose and strategic renewal. This agenda is organized around three main objectives: *testing and elaborating*, *contextualizing*, and *theorizing*, to promote a more coherent and comprehensive understanding of the multiple facets of the purpose-renewal relationship.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Chiara Pantalena: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Methodology, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Luca Manelli:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Conceptualization. **Josip Kotlar:** Writing – review & editing, Supervision, Conceptualization. **Federico Frattini:** Writing – review & editing, Supervision, Conceptualization.

Appendix. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lrp.2025.102591>.

Data availability

No data was used for the research described in the article.

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