

Purpose Governance Education: Emerging Trends and Insights from Canadian Educators (2026)

Introduction

This paper provides an overview of emerging trends in purpose governance education in Canada, based on discussions among governance educators representing leading Canadian governance education organizations. It highlights the key themes and insights that emerged from two Purpose Governance Educator Roundtables hosted by the Canadian Purpose Economy Project, in partnership with Governance Professionals of Canada, on July 21 and 22, 2026. Two sessions were held to accommodate participants' schedules, bringing together 17 governance educators from Canada's leading governance education organizations to exchange experiences, discuss emerging issues, and explore opportunities to strengthen purpose governance education.

Background

The roundtables built on the Canadian Purpose Governance Collaboration established in 2023 among the Canadian Purpose Economy Project (CPEP), Governance Professionals of Canada (GPC), Chartered Governance Institute of Canada (CGIC), The Directors College, Canadian Bar Association In-House Lawyers, and Competent Boards (now part of Board Intelligence). The collaboration was formed to integrate purpose governance into director and governance professional education across Canada. Since its inception, the partners have endorsed the [Purpose Governance Guidelines](#), published the [State of Purpose Governance in Canada \(2024\)](#) report, delivered two national webinars, and collaborated on the development of a [summary of purpose governance education](#) across participating organizations.

The educator roundtables were convened as the next step in strengthening collaboration and advancing purpose governance education. **Purpose governance refers to the role of boards in overseeing an organization's purpose and ensuring it is integrated into strategy, culture, stakeholder relationships, risk oversight, performance, and disclosure.**

Purpose Governance Developments

In 2025 CPEP released [The State of Purpose Governance Among the TSX 60](#), identifying leading practices from WSP, TELUS, Scotiabank, and BMO. The report shows how their boards are embedding purpose into governance by integrating it into board mandates, strategic planning, organizational culture, committee oversight, and public disclosure, providing practical models for other organizations. A report on how TSX 60 companies are disclosing progress on their purpose is forthcoming.

Internationally, ISO published ISO 37000:2021, which establishes purpose as a foundational governance principle, and is developing ISO 37011 guidance on governing purpose-driven organizations expected in 2027.

A parallel development was noted in the internal audit profession. The Institute of Internal Auditors has replaced its long-standing "Definition of Internal Auditing" with a "Purpose of Internal Auditing" in its Global Internal Audit Standards. Together with a new domain outlining board responsibilities for governing the internal audit function, this was seen as reinforcing the broader shift toward purpose-centred governance.

Current Purpose Governance Teaching Practices

Participants teach in governance certification programs covering topics such as ethics, ESG, risk, strategy, and culture. The following summarizes some of the ways participants are incorporating purpose governance into their teaching:

- Positioning purpose as the organization's guiding principle or "north star" for strategy and risk oversight.
- Embedding purpose into board strategy, board roles and responsibilities, organizational culture, codes of conduct, ethics, and enterprise risk management.
- Introducing purpose governance as an emerging governance trend alongside ESG and sustainability governance.
- Using case studies and behavioural simulations that require participants to evaluate board decisions against organizational purpose, objectives, values, ethical considerations, and legal obligations.

- Incorporating purpose into enterprise risk management by introducing approaches for identifying, assessing, managing, monitoring, and reporting purpose-related risks.
- Using the [Purpose Governance Toolkit](#) as a core teaching resource, including as required reading in selected governance modules such as strategy.

Key Observations

Educators shared observations about how learners are responding to purpose governance and the emerging trends they are seeing in purpose governance education.

- **Little or no pushback.** Purpose is now seen as a legitimate issue for boards to pay attention to. It has been well received, with no significant concerns. There is appetite for and recognition of its importance. Purpose is increasingly a given, with learners understanding its relevance.
- **In the behavioural simulation module, learners are reflecting on organizational purpose.** Although the same simulation has been used for 15 years, over the past three years learners have increasingly grounded their analysis in the organization's purpose, asking, in the context of the scenario, "Given the organization's purpose, which course of action should the board take?".
- **The conversation has shifted from purpose versus profit to implementation.** When purpose was first introduced into education a few years ago, most questions were about profit versus purpose, and whether organizations should define or articulate a purpose beyond profit. Now the focus has shifted to, "Now that we have adopted our purpose, how do we implement it?".
- **The term "purpose" is more readily accepted than "social purpose".** Is it important to use an adjective like social? In business, there can be a knee-jerk reaction to the term *social* purpose. The same conversation is more readily accepted when simply using the term purpose.
- **AI and purpose.** If purpose is not clearly defined within the organization, it is difficult to quantify and may be left open to subjective human interpretation. Purpose needs to be clearly defined and supported with a narrative that explains what it means, or it will be open to interpretation by AI.
- **Non-profits and foundations.** There can be indirect pushback because some organizations prioritize revenues over purpose. Some non-profit boards have lost sight of the purpose for which their organizations were established.
- **Purpose and ethics.** Purpose is not yet ingrained in learners' understanding of ethics. They are not making the connection between purpose and ethical decision-making.
- **Purpose and well-being.** Governance professionals are experiencing some level of burnout. Lacking meaning and purpose, and feeling disconnected from organizational values and purpose, can contribute to burnout. There is a link between organizational purpose and well-being at work.
- **A post-COVID shift.** Before COVID, organizations were rarely bumping up against the bounds of why they were put on this earth. Today, the world is in a state of flux, and organizations are trying to rearticulate why they exist and why they are here in the first place.

Overall, the discussions suggest that purpose governance has become an established part of governance education in Canada. The conversation is shifting from whether organizations should adopt a purpose to how boards govern, implement, and operationalize it. New issues, including AI, ethics, and organizational well-being, are broadening the scope of purpose governance education.

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About the Canadian Purpose Economy Project

The Canadian Purpose Economy Project exists to accelerate the transition to the purpose economy. It engages national ecosystem actors to enable social purpose businesses to start, transition, thrive, and grow. The Project convenes, connects, and collaborates to advance social purpose business in Canada and support an economy where purpose is embedded in strategy, decision-making, and long-term value creation.

The Canadian Purpose Economy Project is a project of the Canadian Business for Social Responsibility Education Foundation. Coast Capital is the Founding Purpose Champion. Sign up for our newsletters at:

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