

# Purpose and outcomes

## The purpose may not be what you think it is

Whether it is a meeting, a conversation, a business, a job, a holiday—absolutely any human activity—it is worth asking:

“What is the purpose of this meeting, conversation, business, job, holiday, or whatever?”

## Outcomes

It is essential not to confuse purpose with **outcomes**. Outcomes are events, deliverables or happenings that occur because the meeting, conversation, etc has (more or less) achieved its purpose.

## Purpose

A purpose is one or more thoughts in someone’s mind. You might call it an “intention”. Clearly, by this token, “increase sales”, for example, cannot be a purpose. It is an outcome.

But how often do we answer the question, “what is the purpose of X?”, with “to achieve outcome Y”? As in, “What is the purpose of my business?—To make money”.

A very good exercise goes as follows: if you answer that the purpose of X is A, then ask yourself, isn’t A really an outcome? Even if you don’t think it is, ask yourself, if it *were* an outcome, what would the purpose *really* be?

## Different people have different purposes for the same thing

The purpose of a meeting, say, is likely to be different from your purpose in attending the meeting, which is likely to be different from others’ purposes in attending. These are unlikely to be the same. If this isn’t acknowledged, the meeting will be rambling, unfocussed, unnecessarily long and possibly an unpleasant experience.

The purpose of a personal relationship between two people is definitely not the same as one person’s purpose in being in it, or the other person’s purpose in being in it. And, if this isn’t acknowledged and discussed, the relationship will certainly be less fulfilling than it could be and more unpleasant (if only on occasions).

## Only one purpose

Any meeting, conversation, business, job, holiday, etc, should have only one purpose.

If it looks as if there are two, then one of three things is the case:

(a) the purposes are in fact the same thing, but expressed differently

(b) one purpose is a subset—a special case—of the other so, again, there is only really one purpose

(c) the meeting, or whatever, is literally at cross purposes. It is like a sledge being pulled by two teams of huskies, each in a different direction. At best, progress is slow and, in all probability, the meeting descends into confusion, missed goals and stagnation.

### Actions

There is a third component to this model: **actions**.

The actions are what you say in a meeting, do in a business, and so on, which are designed to achieve the purpose which—if it *is* achieved—will secure the outcomes.

### Example

One client:

- provides IT support services to SMEs (the *actions*),
- so that their clients can continue to trade in the event of an IT failure (my client's *purpose*)
- which results in healthy profits, growth of the business, nice cars parked outside and so on (the *outcomes*).

Please visit [www.emotionalintelligenceatwork.com](http://www.emotionalintelligenceatwork.com) to read these articles:

- > [What is the purpose of your business?](#)
- > [Golfing for beginners](#)
- > Story: [Drill](#)

Jeremy Marchant