



# From Mission-Driven to Impact-Driven: A Framework for Driving Positive Change

**Oyster**<sup>®</sup>

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# A message from our CEO

At Oyster, our mission is to create a more equal world by making it possible for companies everywhere to hire people anywhere.

From day one, I wanted Oyster to be a mission-driven company. Not only because I believe in the potential of our business to have a positive impact, but also because I believe that businesses everywhere have a critical role to play in making our world a better place.

Within a few months of incorporation, we published an **impact thesis** — and are one of the few tech startups to do so at seed stage. We won't be the last.

But building a mission-driven, impact-oriented company from the ground up isn't easy. There's no fool-proof playbook to follow. There are few established best practices to implement. And there aren't many examples of companies that have succeeded in the dual pursuit of positively impacting their bottom line and society at large.



So, we decided to create our own process for transforming our mission into impact. The process took the form of a three-part workshop with the support of impact advisory company **Impact Edge Consulting**, who brought exceptional external expertise into the mix.

We learned a lot throughout the process — both about where our work can have the greatest impact and how to create a focused mission around which to build a company. Now, we want to share that process with others. Maybe it will prompt you to refine your company's mission. Maybe it will help you tailor your mission for maximum impact. Or maybe it will even inspire you to create your own mission-driven company.

Tony

# Why impact matters now more than ever

Creating a company mission isn't a new concept. Companies have had mission statements and vision statements for decades. And at Oyster, we admire many of them.

But what is new is the concept of a company's mission being as focused on its impact on society as it is on its bottom line.

## Some missions we admire

**Unilever:** Unilever's mission is to add vitality to life. We meet everyday needs for nutrition, hygiene and personal care with brands that help people feel good, look good and get more out of life.

**Lego:** Inspire and develop the builders of tomorrow! Our ultimate purpose is to inspire and develop children to think creatively, reason systematically and release their potential to shape their own future - experiencing the endless human possibility.

**Tesla:** Tesla's mission is to accelerate the world's transition to sustainable energy.

**Guideline:** We've made it our mission to help everyone arrive at a safe, secure retirement, whether you're a small business owner, an employee, or self-employed.

**Impossible:** To drastically reduce humanity's destructive impact on the global environment by completely replacing the use of animals as a food production technology.

**Mighty Buildings:** Our mission is to have a positive impact on the environment, local communities, and the housing crisis through our sustainable approach.

When that balance is struck correctly, a mission becomes more than a set of catchy phrases plastered on a company's website or the walls of its office. It becomes something around which everyone — from employees and partners to customers and community members — can rally. It's a reason to join a company. A reason to form a partnership. And a reason to become a customer. Paradoxically, when a mission doesn't focus exclusively on beating competitors, it actually becomes a competitive advantage.

As Oyster's co-founder Jack Mardack puts it, there has been a "values shift" in society in recent years — one that was underway before the pandemic, but has since been dramatically accelerated. Since the first half of 2020, we have been confronted with the challenge of solving some of the most urgent issues we have ever faced as a society: a global pandemic, an increasingly visible climate crisis, and deep-rooted inequality that has hidden in plain sight for centuries. We no longer have the option of looking the other way.

As a result, consumers are setting higher standards for the companies they choose to buy from. Employees are scrutinizing the role their company plays in society. And investors are considering the potential for positive impact as a barometer of likely future success.

In short, price and product offering are no longer the dominant factors that inform decisions.

Mission and impact are.



# What we mean by “impact”



Impact is a nebulous term with no agreed upon definition. This has led to countless cases of “impact washing,” where an organization’s proclaimed focus on being a force for good lacks any meaningful plan or follow through. At best, it could be called marketing fluff. And worst, it could be seen as manipulative fiction.

When embarking on our workshop series at Oyster, we were determined to stay laser focused on the impact we wish to have. And that began by giving the word a clear definition. We used **Impact Management Project’s** description of impact as “a change in outcomes for people and/or the planet.”

Next, we agreed that Oyster’s impact — and any company’s impact for that matter — can occur both directly and indirectly.

For example, every time we help a company to hire a team member who can work from anywhere, we believe this improves that new employee’s life in some way. They might be accessing an employment opportunity that was previously unavailable in their city or country. They might be tapping into a new level of earning potential. Or they might simply be unlocking more flexibility that’ll allow them to spend more time with their families, friends, or themselves. Similarly, there are direct benefits to the environment in the form of reduced emissions caused by long commutes in cars.

At the same time, by building a platform that enables companies everywhere to hire people anywhere, we are also accelerating the shift towards a more equal world — one in which every person has the same opportunity to access their career of choice, every company has the ability to tap into the global talent pool, and every community has the potential to prosper.

We call the former our impact on people and the latter our contribution to systems change.

With those details at the forefront of our thinking, here’s how we went about tailoring our mission for maximum impact.



# A framework for transforming mission into impact



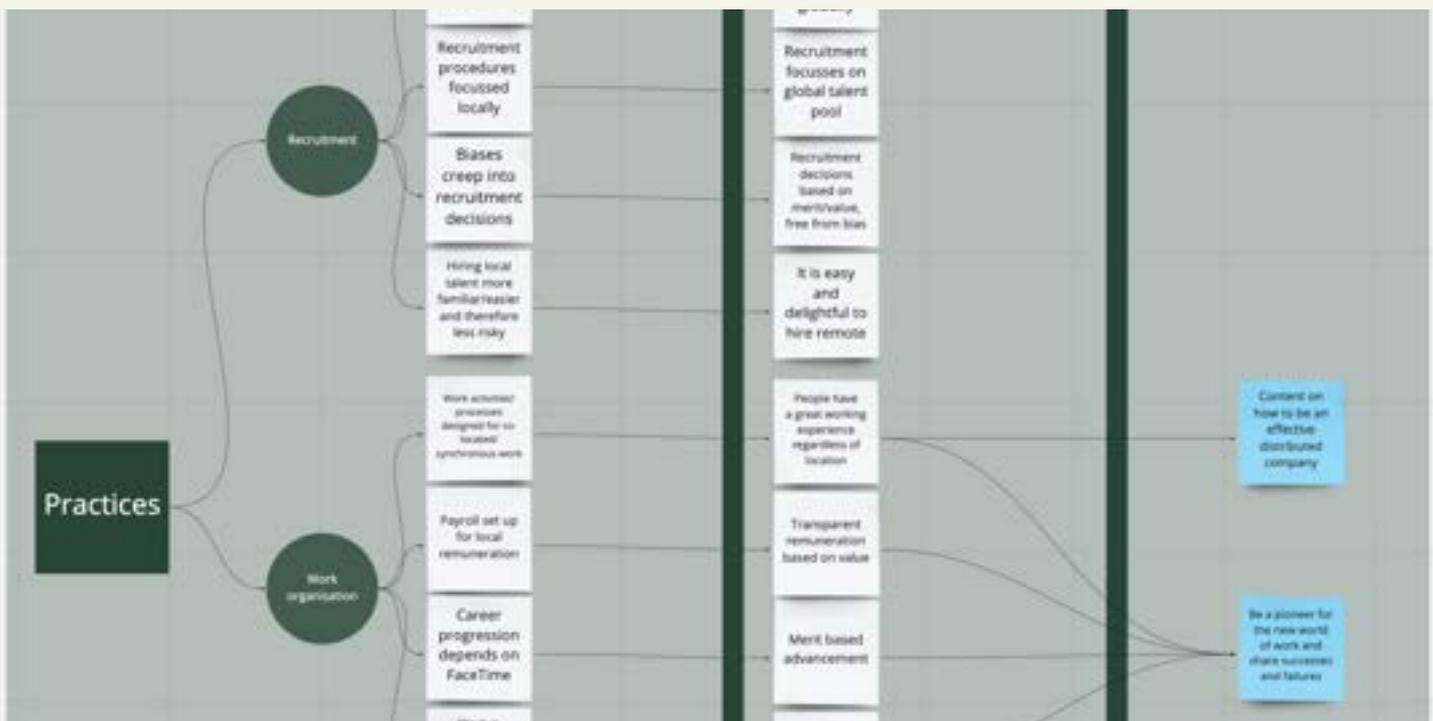
As a fully distributed company, we place huge value on inclusiveness, and it was important to us to have input from all aspects of our business. So, senior leadership, department heads, and staff representatives were all heavily involved in the three workshops we ran.

## Workshop 1: Systems Change

In our first workshop, we focused on systems change and engaged in some big picture thinking. We asked ourselves four questions, which we applied to the global employment system but which can just as easily be applied to whatever system your company is seeking to change for the better.

The four questions are:

- What problem have we observed?
- What are the systems conditions at the root of the problem?
- What would a better version of this system look like?
- How might we close the gap?



Screenshot of the Miro board from Workshop #1.



# The key points that emerged from our discussion were:

1. Mental models are deeply ingrained in the employment system, making it difficult for change to occur. To successfully change the existing system, there first needs to be a dedicated effort made to change people's assumptions about the nature of employment.
2. Even for those convinced of the need to move to a new paradigm of working, established practices create inertia. What's needed are a brand new set of frameworks, as well as innovative tools and processes that can re-define work organization and human resource management.
3. The drivers for the shift to distributed work extend far beyond the boundaries of single organizations. National policies can hinder or accelerate the changing nature of work, and an individual's preferences and beliefs have a similar capacity to augment how quickly change can occur.

Systems change is a complicated endeavour. A company may succeed in tilting the system it is focused on into a more efficient configuration, but inadvertently create negative outcomes for people or the planet. Two recent examples include Uber and Airbnb. Both had aspirations of improving the mobility and hospitality systems respectively and have grown to a huge scale. However, they have both also been met with unintended consequences including concerns over the quality of employment offered to Uber drivers and the effect of Airbnb on housing markets.

That's why our second workshop was focused solely on people, and the importance of having them at the center of all impact-oriented decisions.

## Workshop 2: People

Our second workshop focused on weighing the potential impact on people of transforming the global employment system. The purpose of this session was to provide clarity and alignment on what we want to achieve, and it gave us a useful platform upon which to design our future measures of success.

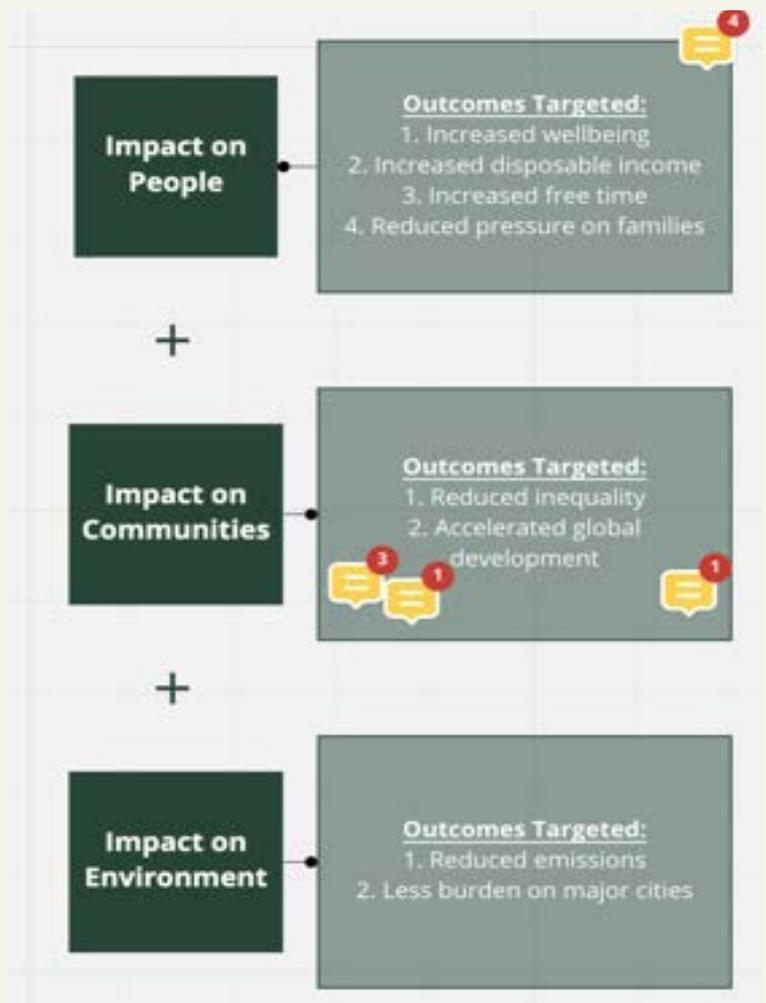
Ultimately, our goal was to hold ourselves accountable for making sure that the changes we seek to drive will have a net positive outcome for human beings everywhere. (And avoid an unintended consequence such as enabling modern day labour arbitrage, for example.)

Over the course of the workshop, we concluded that impact on people occurs when Oyster enables hiring someone remotely who is underserved by the current global employment system, including people who:

1. Are in low-income careers
2. Are geo-locked
3. Experience disabilities or health conditions
4. Are refugees
5. Have caring responsibilities
6. Would prefer to work remotely due to lifestyle choices

Triangulating this with the commercial opportunity across these groups (e.g. the size of the market) led us to focus on the first two groups — people who are in low-income careers and people who are geo-locked. We expect the impact of our work on these groups to include increased disposable income for workers in emerging markets and the associated benefits of this including increased wellbeing, reduced pressure on families, and more. Our full social impact thesis can be found [here](#).

This workshop, along with the first one we conducted, gave us the space to unpack thoughts and ideas which were swirling around the collective consciousness of the Oyster team. The conversation naturally then turned to: How do we put our plans into action? That's where the third workshop comes in.



Screenshot of the Miro board from Workshop #2.

## Workshop 3: Action

Our third workshop was all about action. Based on our new frameworks for understanding the problem we wished to solve, we explored ways to enhance Oyster's impact whilst helping to drive value for the business. Out of this process came two clear next steps. First, driven by our renewed understanding of the problem, we set about establishing impact metrics. We recognized that this will likely evolve over time as our business grows and pivots, but we felt it was critically important to start holding ourselves to account on impact as early as possible.

Second, with our measuring stick in place, we outlined a set of experiments to conduct over the coming 12 months — some of which we launched within weeks of completing the workshop. Those that yield results that drive positive societal impact as well as business value will become standard parts of the Oyster impact playbook for the long term. Anything that doesn't will be reworked or dropped.



Share your  
impact-focused  
mission

Keeping disciplined with this process and always having both our systems change and our impact on people in mind ensures that, as Oyster grows, we remain on the path to becoming an impact unicorn which meaningfully improves the lives of millions of people.

Now, we'd like to invite you to share details of your impact-focused mission with us. Whether it's a set of outcomes you defined by following the process outlined in this guide or an impact-first strategy that has long existed, we'd like to hear it. Email it to [impact@oysterhr.com](mailto:impact@oysterhr.com), and over time will share the ones we think others will find inspiring.

After all, no one company can address every single area of society which could be improved. But by working together, be that in the form of commercial partnerships, or simply looking to one another for inspiration, we will all have a better chance at solving the issues we seek to resolve.