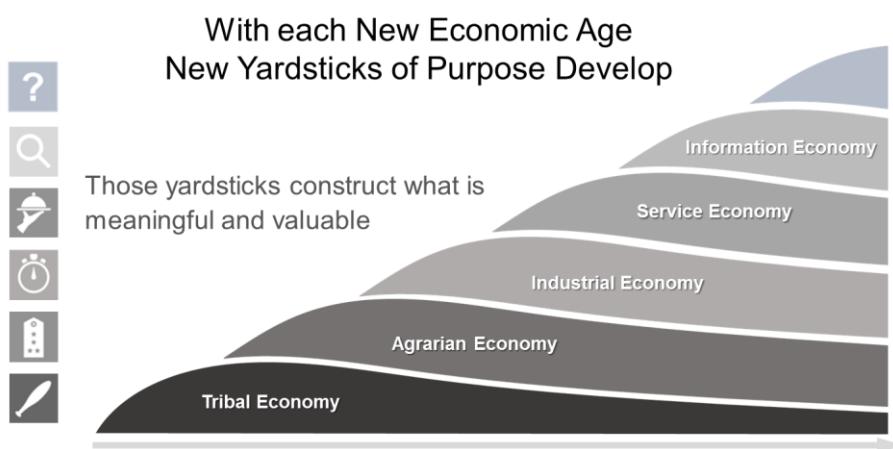FH·W·S

Yardsticks of Purpose

Identifying the yardsticks that construct what is meaningful and valuable

Prof. Dr. Bernd Ankenbrand

University of Applied Sciences Wuerzburg – Schweinfurt, Germany
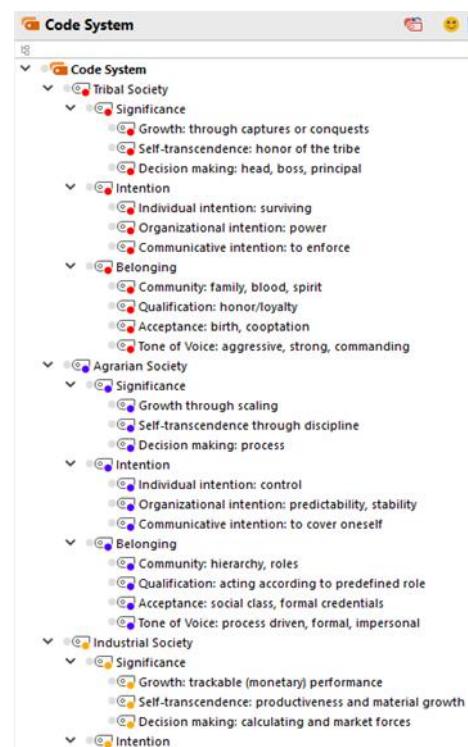
Introduction

Recently the corporate world has increasingly emphasized the importance of purpose (Keller 2016). Although the relevance of purpose for business success (EY Beacon Institute 2016) as well as personal fulfillment (Bailey 2016) has extensively been researched, our understanding of the underlying yardsticks by which purpose is measured remain largely unexplored.

With each New Economic Age
New Yardsticks of Purpose Develop

Those yardsticks construct what is meaningful and valuable

Information Economy
Service Economy
Industrial Economy
Agrarian Economy
Tribal Economy

Methods

During an interactive seminar with international students studying business and engineering at the university of applied sciences in Würzburg-Schweinfurt, we identified the hidden yardsticks of purpose communicated by companies – both intended and unintended – using qualitative content analysis (Mayering 2014) with help of MAXQDA as software tool.

Building on a code system that differentiates the specific yardsticks for **significance**, **intention** (=goals) and **belonging** throughout economic ages, we coded a wide variety of corporate communications: mission statements, advertisements, recruiting documents, financial statements, announcements via twitter, Facebook, etc., pictures of offices, interviews with managers and employees.

The usage of MAXQDA allowed us to code within a single software environment transcripts, images, audio- and video files as well as tweets and websites. The multilingual interface of MAXQDA made it possible for the diverse student group to work with a software in their native language, thereby increasing their productivity.
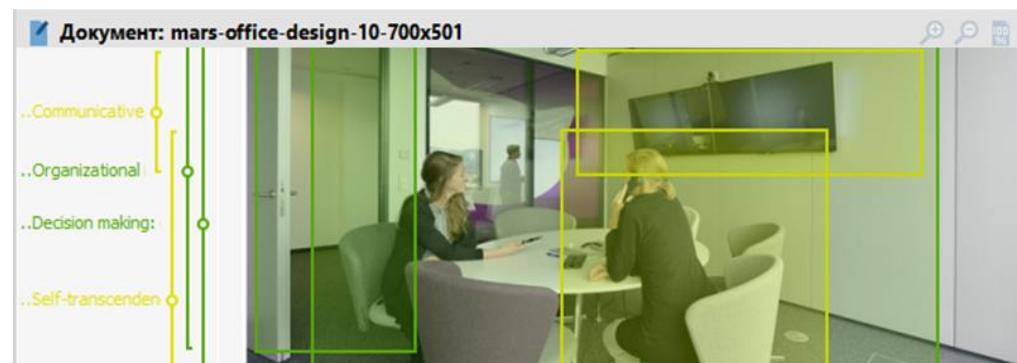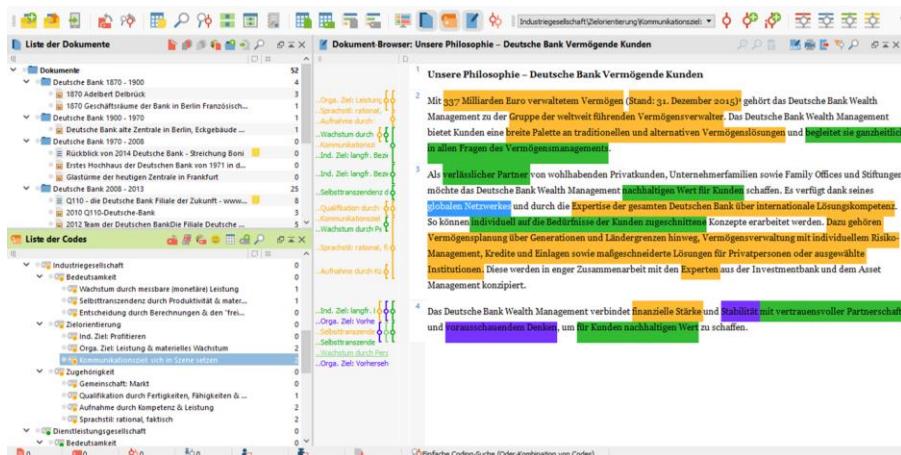
Key Results

We could show that companies measure their significance, intention and belonging by different purpose yard-sticks. For example the purpose of "Deutsche Bank" is both explicitly and even more so implicitly referencing to yardsticks of the industrial economy; whereas the purpose yardsticks of "Genossenschaftsbanken" clearly fall into the service economy.

By coding corporate offices we could demonstrate that e.g. Mars Inc. utilizes interior design elements to emphasize purpose yardsticks of both the service- and information economy.

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