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Drifting Away: An Experimental Investigation of Mission Drift Consequences in Social Entrepreneurship from an Employee Perspective

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Social entrepreneurship is a hybrid form of entrepreneurship combining the aspirations to fulfil a social mission and independently generate financial income on a competitive market. While social enterprises offer notable chances to make up for inefficiencies in sustainable social value creation by governments and Non-Governmental Organizations during social hardships, they face the risk of losing their social missions over time. This effect is coined mission drift (MD). To date, MD-research suffers from notable shortcomings like the negligence of possible effects on social enterprise employees and robust experimental evidence. My study employs a sample of university students (N = 137) and a vignette-based experimental design to examine how different kinds of MD (no MD; soft MD, strong MD, mission shift from social to ecological) affect important work-related attitudes of social enterprise employees. MANOVA results yield that, compared to no MD, strong MD has a notable and broad detrimental impact. Furthermore, indications for differential effects depending on MD-magnitude and for mission shift are found. Despite acknowledgeable limitations, the current study emphasizes the importance of an employee perspective on MD and offers rare causal evidence on MD-consequences.

Key words: social enterprise, mission drift, employee, experiment, vignette

Introduction

In the last ten years, the world has been hit by a cascade of crises. To exemplify, in 2015 European countries experienced a massive influx of refugees from war-stricken countries like Syria (Hampshire, 2015); in 2020 the COVID-19 pandemic killed thousands of people worldwide (Spinelli & Pellino, 2020); and, starting in February 2022, the Russo-Ukrainian war ended decades of peace on the European continent (Plokhy, 2023). While the causes and effects of these crises differ, they have two notable commonalities. First, all crises caused large-scale social hardship.

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Second, national governments struggled providing timely and sufficient support. Stepping in to fill these gaps, social enterprises (SEs), i.e., hybrid enterprises combining a social mission and financial value creation on a competitive market, emerged as a notable resource for alleviating social hardship in an innovative and financially sustainable manner (Bacq et al., 2020).

One central challenge faced by hybrid social enterprises is mission drift (MD), i.e., a commercialization, and, as a result, loss of hybridity (Tracey & Phillips, 2007). In recent years, notable progress was made in studying MD. This includes insights regarding the dynamic processes underlying MD (Cornforth, 2014; Grimes et al., 2019), MD-effects on SE-stakeholders and investors (Klein et al., 2021) or the identification of different kinds of MD (Bruder, 2025). However, three central shortcomings persist. First, whereas MD is frequently studied from the perspectives of social entrepreneurs, the enterprise as an organizational entity, and its external stakeholders, the (potential) effects on SE-workforces are largely overlooked. This is particularly surprising given the important role of employees in typically small and community-grounded SEs (Austin et al., 2006; Bort, in press; Dorado et al., 2022). Second, while scholars acknowledge that MD can occur in different forms (e.g., not only from social to commercial) and with a variable magnitude (e.g., soft or strong; cf. Samaranayake and Banuri (2020)), this is not mirrored in empirical work. Third, experimental research on MD is extremely scarce (Bhuiyan et al., 2020). Most studies are conceptual or use existing large-scale data sets retrieved from national or global data bases (Ebrahim et al., 2014; Zhang et al., 2025). Despite the merits of these methodologies, unlike experiments, they do not allow drawing causal conclusions. This limits the credibility of their postulated cause-effect-relationships (Kruse, 2020b).

The current paper addresses these three research gaps. Applying an experimental design, I examine changes in important work-related attitudes like work engagement triggered by different MD-scenarios using a sample of university students.

Mission Drift in Social Entrepreneurship

For the largest parts of its history, entrepreneurship was conceptualized as a purely commercially-driven activity (Cantillon, 1756; Murphy et al., 2006). In the 1980´s, Young pioneered the thought of mission-driven entrepreneurship. This form of entrepreneurship still applies entrepreneurial means and aspires to generate financial revenue, however, its main driver is a non-financial mission. One of the best-known forms of mission-driven entrepreneurship is social entrepreneurship. Social entrepreneurship´s main target is the creation of social value, for example, by alleviating poverty or overcoming the marginalization of certain social groups (Battilana & Lee, 2014). In contrast to traditional Non-Governmental Organizations, social enterprises do so, based on an elaborated business model on a competitive market. This way, they aspire to generate their own income and remain financially independent (Kruse et al., 2021). To illustrate, the Italian social enterprise San Patrignano employs members of marginalized social groups (former drug addicts and prisoners) as bakers and dog trainers selling the goods and services to the local community (Perrini et al., 2010). Consequently, social value creation in SE is not instrumental to reach commercial goals but has a fundamental nature (Stephan et al., 2016). Over the years, notable progress has been made in SE-research. These include insights regarding the motivation of social entrepreneurs, social impact metrics, or stereotypes against social entrepreneurs (Kruse & Kamau, 2024; Kruse

et al., 2021; Rawhouser et al., 2019). One of the current hot SE-topics is concerned with mission drift.

Despite an ongoing debate on the exact definition of MD (Varendh-Mansson et al., 2020), broadly, the concept can be defined as an actual or perceived discontinuity in organizational actions related to their organizational image (Grimes et al., 2019). In the SE-context, this usually encompasses the commercialization of social enterprises, i.e., the loss of their social mission and the "transformation" from a hybrid to a commercial enterprise. Reviewing MD-literature yields advancements regarding MD-causes and effects. On the one hand, studies exist regarding the role of corporate governance (Bruneel et al., 2016; Ebrahim et al., 2014), organizational management (Battilana et al., 2018), and organizational values (Grimes et al., 2019) as determinants of MD. On the other hand, scholars have examined empirical underpinnings of MD-effects, for example MD-quantification (Staessens et al., 2019) and MD-consequences for financial and social outreach (Quayes, 2021; Ranjani et al., 2025; Zhao, 2014). However, MD-research also suffers from notable shortcomings.

Putting Employees in Mission Drift Research

One of the most striking results when reviewing MD-literature is that MD-effects on social enterprise workforces are almost entirely neglected. In fact, all studies mentioned in the previous section either focus on the social entrepreneur as organizational leader, MD-relations to organizational metrics, or effects on investors as external stakeholders. While this seems natural, as MD reflects organizational level change, neglecting potential effects on employees falls short of acknowledging (i) the central role of employees in social enterprises and (ii) the relevance of organizational changes to employees as *internal* SE-stakeholders.

Drawing from Schein`s model of organizational culture, it becomes apparent that organizational-level aspects may shape attitudes of organizational members (Schein, 1990). The alignment of organizational and personal values is key to securing positive employee attitudes towards the organization and their retention. In the SE-context, this notion received support in a study by Dorado et al. (2022). They found that the mission of SEs was one central element for employee identification. Consequently, I argue that MD from a hybrid SE to a commercial enterprise disrupts the alignment of organizational and personal values and negatively affects four important employee attitudes:

(i) *Work engagement* is defined as 'a positive work-related state of mind characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption' (p.74) (Schaufeli et al., 2002) and positively relates to employee creativity and performance (Shimazu et al., 2012). Organizational mission fulfillment was shown to positively affect employee work engagement (Karatepe & Aga, 2016). Thus, in case of MD, I expect employees to perceive a decrease in mission fulfilment and negative effects on work engagement:

H_1*:* MD in social enterprises leads to a decrease in employees' work engagement.

(ii) *Organizational citizenship behavior (OCB)* describes voluntary and additional commitment to one`s work and organizational goals not covered by contractual employee duties (Organ, 1988). OCB is positively related to organizational performance and particularly valuable for SEs that can only offer limited financial incentives (Austin et al., 2006). MD in SEs is postulated to reduce the willingness to work beyond contractually fixed hours and duties, due to a reduction in personal-organizational goal alignment (Cornforth, 2014):

H_2*:* MD in social enterprises leads to a decrease in employees' OCB.

(iii) *Organizational commitment* (Allen & Meyer, 1990) encompasses a) the acceptance

of and identification with organizational values (affective), b) the belief that personal work invested in the organization leads to positive personal outcomes (continuance), and c) the conviction to support organizational actions based on internalized social norms (normative). Cornforth (2014) highlights that SE-workforces are stimulated by the shared personal and organizational prosocial values and the promise of meaningful work. In case of MD, organizational commitment should decline, as value identification decreases (affective), employees no longer belief that their work investments serve prosocial goals (continuance), and MD could be considered a norm violation (normative):

H_3: MD in social enterprises leads to a decrease in employees' commitment.

(iv) *Turnover intention* describes the intention of employees to voluntarily exit an organization and is considered a good predictor of actual exit from an organization (Parasuraman, 1982). Building on the argumentations deriving H_1-H_3, I expect an increase of turnover intentions after MD in SEs:

H_4: MD in social enterprises leads to an increase in employees' turnover intentions.

While studying the effects of MD compared to no-MD-conditions is feasible, this dichotomy seems too simplistic given the dynamic environment SEs operate in (Day & Schoemaker, 2016). It seems likely that different magnitudes of MD exist, which could have differential effects on employee attitudes. Facing financial problems or crises like COVID-19, a "soft" MD could be considered reasonable by employees to keep the enterprise alive (Kruse, in press). In contrast, "strong" MDs under no or limited external pressure could appear more like a voluntary action on the way from a social to a commercial enterprise. In line with this reasoning, Samaranayake and Banuri (2020) argue that MD-magnitude should be considered when studying MD-effects. Consequently, I examine the following research question:

RQ_1: Are there differences in MD-effects on employees' work engagement, OCB, organizational commitment, and turnover intentions depending on MD-magnitude (soft vs. strong)?

In line with the work by Weisbrod (2004), the dominating perspective on MD comprises a decline in an enterprise's social mission for the sake of pursuing commercial goals. However, building on Grimes et al. (2019), MD can be conceptualized broader and encompass all perceived discontinuities in the organizational mission. Thus, MD could also occur when an enterprise keeps its hybridity but adapts its second mission. Similar to MD, this "mission shift" is usually triggered by external events. However, while MD entails a loss of one mission component, mission shift can be seen as a mission adaptation preserving hybridity. Drawing from Elkington's (1998) triple-bottom-line approach in which entrepreneurial sustainability is composed of people (social), profit (financial), and planet (ecology), mission shift encompasses the possibility of a transition either from social to ecological or vice versa. This dynamic perspective aligns with efforts to integrate different forms of hybrid entrepreneurship under umbrella terms like sustainable entrepreneurship (Bonfanti et al., 2024) or entrepreneurship for the public good (Vedula et al., 2022), in which social and ecological missions can be pursued to varying degrees.

In sum, literature yields (i) the existence of notable differences between MD and mission shift, mainly the possibility to dynamically and adaptively shift missions while keeping hybridity, and (ii) conceptualizations integrating social and ecological missions in entrepreneurship. However, so far, mission shift consequences are empirically underexplored. Thus, I investigate the following research question:

RQ_2: How does a mission shift affect employees' work engagement, OCB, organizational commitment, and turnover intentions?

Methods

Experimental Procedure

The study was designed as an online experiment using LimeSurvey and encompassed four main stages. In stage 1, participants were welcomed, educated on the general purpose of the study, data protection, and the voluntary nature of the study. In stage 2, participants, received the instruction to imagine working in the human resources department of the fictional social enterprise *Smoo-port* – vignette based on Kruse et al. (2019). Afterwards, they rated the dependent variables (work engagement, OCB, organizational commitment, and turnover intentions; measurement 1). In stage 3, participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions: (i) no MD (increasing *Smoo-port*`s portfolio), (ii) soft MD (reduction of social project investments from 20% to 15% to remain competitive), (iii) strong MD (reduction of social project investments from 20% to 5% to remain competitive), (iv) mission shift (investment in ecological instead of social projects). Subsequently, participants were asked whether a mission drift occurred (manipulation check) and rated the dependent variables again (measurement 2). The rationale for the operationalization of soft and strong MD-conditions was two-fold. First, the investment quota of 20% was chosen as the German gross fixed capital formation, i.e., the investment quota was 20.90% in 2024 (cf. Rudnicka (2025). Second, while both MD-conditions yield a reduction in social investments, in the soft MD condition, the share of social investment is still above 50%. In the strong MD-condition, the social investment percentage drops below 50%. In stage 4, participants indicated their age and sex and the study ended.

A more detailed outline (Figure OSM 1) and all vignettes are presented as online supplementary material.

Participants

Recruiting participants, I focused on university students at one big German university. This decision was driven by findings that university graduates are (i) a common workforce in enterprises in general (Krabel, 2018) and (ii) usually more driven by social than financial purposes, which makes a career as an SE-employee more probable (Dreyer & Stojanová, 2023). Participants were included if they (i) were at least 18 years old, (ii) had a sufficient German language proficiency to understand the vignettes presented (C1 or above), and (iii) had a general interest in working in human resource. As an incentive, participants could earn a course credit.

Before recruitment, a power analysis using G-Power was computed to determine a sufficient, yet, economic sample size (Faul et al., 2007). Drawing from previous research examining general and SE-specific stereotype effects (Kruse & Kamau, 2024; Swim, 1994), I expected effects sizes ranging between .25 and .30. Based on our study design and data analysis strategy, this yielded a sample range of $100 \leq N \leq 144$ (cf. Figure OSM 2 in supplementary material).

A convenience sample of N = 137 participants was acquired for the study (age: M = 25.60; SD = 9.76; 84% female). All of them fulfilled inclusion criteria and successfully passed the manipulation check.

Measures

Work engagement was assessed with nine items from Utrecht Work Engagement Scale

(UWES-9; Schaufeli et al., 2006; German version) covering the three sub-constructs "vigor" (example item: 'At my work, I feel bursting with energy') "dedication" (example item 'I am enthusiastic about my job'), and "absorption" (example item: 'I am immersed in my work'). A 7-point Likert scale from 0 ('never') to 6 ('always') was used. Internal consistencies (α) were .92 (measurement 1) and .82 (measurement 2).

OCB was assessed with 20 items from the German scale „Fragebogen zur Erfassung des leistungsbezogenen Arbeitsverhaltens zur Selbsteinschätzung" (FELA-S) by Staufenbiel and Hartz (2000). This scale encompasses the four sub-constructs "helpfulness" (example item: 'I help others when they are overloaded with work'), "straightforwardness" (example item: 'I express reservations about any changes in the company'; inverted), "self-initiative" (example item: 'I take the initiative to protect the company from potential problems'), and "diligence" (example item: 'I inform the company in advance if I cannot come to work'). A 7-point Likert scale from 1 ('not at all') to 7 ('absolutely') was used. Internal consistencies (α) were .86 (measurement 1) and .73 (measurement 2).

Organizational commitment was assessed with 14 items from the German scale „Commitment Organisation, Beruf und Beschäftigungsform" (COBB) by Felfe et al. (2014). This scale encompasses the three commitment sub-constructs "affective" (example item: 'I would be very happy to spend the rest of my working life in this organization'), "continuance" (example item: 'There would be too many disadvantages for me if I were to leave this organization at the moment'), and "normative" (example item: 'I wouldn't leave the organization now because I feel indebted to some people in it'). A 5-point Likert scale from 1 ('not at all') to 5 ('absolutely') was used. Internal consistencies (α) were .77 (measurement 1) and .92 (measurement 2).

Turnover intention was assessed with three items from Steffens et al. (2018). An example item was 'I often think about quitting my job'. A 7-point Likert scale from 1 ('not at all') to 7 ('absolutely') was used. Internal consistency for both measurements was α = .82.

Internal consistencies for all sub-scales are displayed in Table OSM 1 (online supplementary material).

Statistical Procedure

Data was analyzed following a three-step procedure. First, I examined variance homogeneity as an important pre-condition for further analyses using the Levene test. Second, a repeated-measures multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) based on the General Linear Model was applied to investigate hypotheses and research questions. Third, as post-hoc-tests, Bonferroni-corrected pairwise comparisons were applied to identify between which one(s) of the four conditions significant changes occurred. In steps two and three, age and sex were entered as control variables. All calculations were conducted with IBM SPSS Statistics.

Results

Pre-Analysis

To examine variance homogeneity, I ran a separate Levene test for all dependent variables. The analyses yielded no significant results, i.e., no indication for a violation of the homogeneity assumption. This indicates that the data is suitable for a MANOVA (Field, 2018).

Hypotheses

The results of repeated-measures MANOVA with age and sex as control variables are displayed in Table 1. Since in the repeated-mea-

Table 1 *MANOVA results including interactions and post-hoc-tests*

Construct	Sub-Construct	Main Effect[1]		Interaction[1]			Summary
		F^2	η^2	F^2	η^2	ΔM (condition)	
Work Engagement	Vigor	26.03**	.16	7.20**	.14	-.91* (strong)	H_1 supported for vigor and dedication
	Dedication	41.19**	.24	11.07**	.20	-1.50** (strong)	
	Absorption	18.31**	.12	5.90	.12	-	
Organizational Citizenship Behavior	Helpfulness	24.98**	.16	6.21	.10	-	H_2 not supported
	Straightforwardness	5.38*	.04	4.44	.04	-	
	Self-Initiative	7.66*	.05	6.54	.11	-	
	Diligence	22.58**	.15	1.28	.03	-	
Organizational Commitment	Affective	85.47**	.39	19.78**	.31	-1.22** (strong)	H_3 supported for affective and normative commitment
	Continuance	33.21**	.20	4.39	.09	-	
	Normative	33.67**	.20	7.10**	.14	-.90* (strong)	
Turnover Intention	-	32.39**	.20	9.10**	.17	.43** (strong)	H_4 supported

Note. [1] = "Main effect" indicates the effects of experimental conditions alone whereas "interaction" signifies the interaction of experimental conditions and time (cf. section 4.2); [2] = All *F*-values are presented for respective degrees of freedom. η^2 = Effect size; ΔM (condition) = Significant post-hoc mean differences with change in mean compared to no-mission-drift condition as baseline. Analyses include age and sex as control variables.
* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

sure analyses the interaction effects between the experimental conditions and time are decisive to identify changes caused by the experimental manipulation, this column is used to determine whether hypotheses were supported (Field, 2018). All means and standard deviations are displayed in Table OSM 2 (online supplementary material).

Hypothesis H_1 postulated a decrease in employee work engagement following MD. As Table 1 yields, a significant overall interaction effect for vigor ($F(3,133) = 7.20$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .14$) and dedication ($F(3,133) = 11.07$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .20$) emerged. Going more into detail, I found significant decreases in vigor ($_{\Delta}M = -.91$; $p < .05$) and dedication ($_{\Delta}M = -1.50$; $p < .01$) in case of a strong MD compared to no MD. This supports hypothesis H_1. No significant effect was found for absorption. Thus, H_1 is partly supported.

Hypothesis H_2 suggested a decrease in employee OCB following MD. As can be seen in Table 1, no significant interaction effects were found for either sub-construct. Consequently, H_2 receives no support.

Hypothesis H_3 predicted a decrease in organizational commitment following MD. I found a significant interaction effect for affective ($F(3,133) = 19.78$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .31$) and normative commitment ($F(3,133) = 7.10$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .14$) originating from a decrease under strong MD conditions compared to no MD ($_{\Delta}M_{affective} = -1.22$; $p < .01$; $_{\Delta}M_{normative} = -.90$; $p < .05$). Thus, H_3 is supported for affective and normative commitment (Table 1). However, no significant effect is found for continuance commitment resulting in H_3 receiving partial support.

Hypothesis H_4 postulated an increase in turnover intentions following MD. Since a significant interaction effect occurred ($F(3,133) = 9.10$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .17$), originating from an increase under strong MD compared to no MD ($_{\Delta}M = .43$; $p < .01$), H_4 is fully supported (Table 1).

No significant effects for control variables emerged.

Research Questions

Investigating RQ_1 yielded that, despite no significant differences comparing soft and strong MD conditions, strong MD conditions significantly worsened work engagement (vigor, dedication) and commitment (affective, normative) and increased turnover intentions compared to no MD (cf. Hypotheses). This was not the case for soft MD. Thus, the results indicate (i) differences in MD-effects depending on its magnitude and (ii) more detrimental effects of strong MD.

RQ_2 focused on effects of mission shift. Analyzing the data yielded a significant decrease of normative commitment compared to no MD ($_{\Delta}M = -.61$; $p < .05$), significantly higher affective commitment compared to strong MD ($_{\Delta}M = 1.19$; $p < .05$), and significantly lower turnover intentions compared to strong MD ($_{\Delta}M = -.31$; $p < .05$). This suggests that mission shift has some distinctive effects.

Discussion

The current study applies an experimental design to examine effects of different kinds of MD from an employee perspective. In a vignette-setting, $N = 137$ participants imagine working for a social enterprise that is either experiencing no MD, soft MD or strong MD. Additionally, mission shift effects (change to ecological mission) are explored using repeated measure MANOVA and post-hoc tests.

Hypothesis H_1 was partly supported, as vigor and dedication significantly decreased under strong MD. This complements the work by Karatepe and Aga (2016), who found a positive effect of mission fulfillment on employee work engagement, by showing that deviation from social enterprise mission negatively af-

fects two work engagement sub-constructs. The non-significant finding for absorption could be explained in two ways. First, absorption, encompassing immersion in one´s current activity and high concentration, is rather independent from organizational missions. In fact, detachment from surroundings is one key element of absorption, which could include the detachment from MD and a pure focus on one's task. Second, following Salanova and and Schaufeli (2008), there is a strong link of absorption to the flow concept. Thus, conceptually, it is relatively fuzzy and should be treated as "a consequence of work engagement, rather than one of its components" (p. 118).

Hypothesis H_2 received no support, as none of the OCB sub-constructs reached significance. This seems counter-intuitive given the reliance of social enterprises on employee extra-role behavior (Austin et al., 2006). However, research yields strong roots of OCB in personality traits (Chiaburu et al., 2011). As personality is relatively stable, even MD could be insufficient to alter OCB. Methodologically, the current study uses a vignette-design. Thus, the psychological ties to the fictional social enterprise presented could be too weak and decontextualized to trigger OCB change.

Hypothesis H_3 received support for affective and normative commitment, since a decrease under strong MD conditions was found. This supports the assumption that negative MD reactions by external stakeholders could originate from a perceived value shift and norm violation (Grimes et al., 2019; Klein et al., 2021). Furthermore, these results indicate similar mechanisms for employees as internal stakeholders. One reason for the non-significant results for continuance commitment could be that, even in the strong MD condition, the social mission was not entirely abandoned. Thus, participants might still believe in a stronger and more fundamental social mission compared to a commercial enterprise (Stephan et al., 2016).

Hypothesis $H_{4,}$ postulating higher turnover intentions following MD, was fully supported. This underlines the substantial risk of employee loss in case of (strong) MD and, in turn, emphasizes that the social mission is one central driver for employees to work for social enterprises.

Exploring RQ_1 on MD-magnitude, I found no significant differences directly comparing soft and strong MD conditions. However, in contrast to the manifold negative consequences of strong MD (cf. H_1-H_4), the effects of soft MD-conditions did not significantly differ from no MD-condition effects. My finding suggests that MD is unlikely to be an "absolute" phenomenon but has a differential impact depending on MD-magnitude. This supports the corresponding assumption of Samaranayake and Banuri (2020) for employees as well.

RQ_2 dealing with mission shift yielded several significant differences. On the one hand, the decrease in normative commitment compared to no MD highlights that a perceived norm violation does not only occur in case of a commercialization but also in case of a social mission being replaced by another non-commercial mission. This favors the rather broad MD-conceptualization by Grimes et al. (2019). On the other hand, detrimental effects on affective commitment and turnover intentions were weaker compared to strong MD. Thus, mission shift may attenuate some negative effects of commercial MD. In sum, mission shift consequences appear to range "in-between" no and strong MD-conditions.

Implications for Theory and Practice

The main implications of the current paper are the following:

First, despite the limitation of not examining real social enterprise employees (cf. Limitations) my study is one of the first to empirically investigate MD from an employee perspective. Thereby, I highlight the importance of complementing previous literature predominantly focusing on MD-effects for social entrepreneurs and external stakeholders. The significant findings in this vignette study could hint at the existence of MD-effects on actual employees, who are important internal stakeholders. Thus, a similar study should be conducted with SE-employees to consolidate my findings

Second, the experimental nature of my study allows to draw causal conclusions regarding MD-consequences. This is not possible when analyzing cross-sectional data that still dominates MD-landscape. I encourage MD-scholars to engage more in experimental research to complement existing studies and increase the solidity of our knowledge base (Bhuiyan et al., 2020; Kruse, 2020b).

Third, my findings underline the innate complexity of MD. On the one hand, the current study suggests that MD-magnitude is an important variable to consider. On the other hand, mission shift seems to be an empirically distinct sub-type of MD. Future work could deepen our understanding, e.g., by exploring *when* MD is perceived as "soft" or "strong" and *how* mission shifts in other directions (e.g., from ecological to social) affect internal and external stakeholders.

Fourth, as strong MD and the corresponding change of organizational values worsens work engagement, commitment and turnover intentions, the current study is in line with central assumptions by Schein (1990) whose model highlights the importance of organizational and employee value alignment. However, insignificant findings for soft MD could indicate a certain level of tolerance for organizational value changes. Future research could further investigate the underlying mechanisms and moderators regarding MD-tolerance.

Fifth, from a practitioner's perspective, my study offers valuable insights for social entrepreneurs. As the results show, MD may have negative effects on work engagement, commitment, and employee retention. Thus, under MD-conditions, social entrepreneurs should pay particular attention to a transparent and collaborative information policy for external *and* internal stakeholders to attenuate detrimental effects.

Limitations

The current study suffers from notable restrictions.

First, regarding the sample, I do not investigate real social enterprise employees. The sample used is composed of university students. While this is not uncommon in experimental SE-research (cf. Kruse & Rosing, 2023), the study-setting remains fictitious. This could have biased the results as the hypothetical scenario could evoke unauthentic attitudinal and emotional responses. Despite including an MD-manipulation check, one cannot be sure whether participants "dived into" the experimental scenario or just saw it as participating in a study.

Second, regarding the dependent variables examined, only a selection of possible constructs was included. Important constructs like job satisfaction or person-job-fit could also be affected by MD. This notably limits the paper's scope.

Third, the study only covers one potential reason for MD. In the experimental scenario, MD is self-initiated by the social entrepreneur to keep the enterprise competitive. Whether MD triggered by external shocks or crises has differential impacts on employee perceptions cannot be answered by this study.

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