

Abstract

Hybrid organizations try to earn revenue while also pursuing a social or environmental mission. Because they follow different logics at the same time, they are especially at risk of mission drift. This phenomenon means a gradual move away from its original purpose. Most research so far explains mission drift by looking at structural or organizational factors. Much less is known about how people inside these organizations make sense of it. Therefore, the aim of this thesis is to explore how managers make sense of mission drift and how these interpretations influence their responses. In order to answer the research question “From a sensemaking perspective, how do managers interpret and respond to mission drift”, the study applies Karl Weick’s sensemaking perspective. A qualitative research design was chosen. The thesis is based on ten semi-structured interviews with managers from social start-ups founded within the last ten years. The data were analyzed using the Gioia Methodology. The findings reveal three different reaction patterns: Mission Guardians defend their core mission; Pragmatic Adaptors accept deviations to ensure survival and maximize long-term impact; Resigner accept mission drift reluctantly. These patterns do not replace each other but can coexist within the same person over time. The thesis shows that mission drift is not only a structural problem but also a matter of interpretation and judgment. It contributes to the literature by shifting attention from organizational change to the way individuals make sense of mission drift in hybrid organizations.

Keywords: *hybrid organizations, mission drift, sensemaking, reaction patterns, coexistence*