



Reconceptualizing Mission Drift: An Affective Events Perspective

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Abstract

Mission drift, the derailing of practices from the mission, remains a persistent puzzle in hybrid organizations and mission-driven organizations. Existing literature, rooted in institutional theory and resource dependence, often portrays it as a strategic, macro-level response to external pressures. This conceptual article argues for a micro-foundational shift, proposing Affective Events Theory (AET) as a novel lens to explain the affective micro-processes that precipitate mission drift. We theorize how specific organizational events (e.g., funding shocks, investor interactions, leadership changes) generate discrete emotional episodes in employees. The methodological framework integrates a systematic review approach to analyse thematic content. The findings show that by introducing Affective Events Theory, we provide a dynamic model that explores how emotionally charged events, like resource constraints, stakeholder tensions, and governance shifts, cause emotional reactions that influence 'micro-decisions'. Practical implications reveal their relevance in organizational culture and routines. AET will help embed positive emotional reinforcements in organizational culture. This approach highlights the under-explored role of affect as a critical mediator between external events and internal mission fidelity, offering a more nuanced perspective.

Keywords: mission drift, affective events theory, emotions, hybridity, micro-foundations

1. Introduction

Mission drift, a critical challenge for mission-driven organizations, occurs when organizations lose sight of their social missions (Wry & Zhao, 2018), thereby straying from their core purpose despite strong safeguards in place. This paradox highlights the complex interplay between organizational values and practices. While existing literature has primarily focused on macro-level explanations such as institutional theory and resource dependence, these perspectives often overlook the micro-level, internal, and affective processes through which external pressures translate into organizational action. It is expected that the affective states of individual decision-makers will have a substantial impact on strategic decision-making processes in organizations (Ashton-James & Ashkanasy, 2008), therefore, to address this gap,

we propose applying Affective Events Theory (AET) as a potent yet underexplored lens for understanding mission drift. AET provides a micro-foundational account that introduces affect as a core explanatory mechanism, reconceptualizing drift as an emergent process. This approach bridges macro pressures with micro-level experiences, offering a more nuanced understanding of how mission drift unfolds within organizations. Our model traces the causal sequence from specific mission-relevant affective events to the discrete emotional episodes they trigger, leading to localized decoupling actions taken by individuals through affective and judgment-driven pathways.

These individual actions ultimately compound into organization-level drift. By focusing on the emotional dynamics of mission fidelity, our aim is to provide a more comprehensive explanation of why organizations consistently deviate from their stated values and missions. This perspective contributes to the literature by 1. Providing a micro-foundational account of mission drift 2. Introducing affect as a core explanatory mechanism 3. Reconceptualizing drift as an emergent process 4. Bridging macro pressures with micro-level experiences. By examining the role of emotions in organizational decision-making and behavior, we offer new insights into the complex processes underlying mission drift. This approach has important implications for understanding and managing mission-driven organizations, particularly in the context of social enterprises, NGOs, and other hybrid organizations facing institutional complexity and competing demands.

Using Affective Events Theory, we ask how specific organizational events like funding shocks, investor negotiations, or leadership changes or substitutions generate discrete emotional episodes in employees and decision-making actors, and how these emotional episodes, in turn, shape micro-decisions and behaviors that slowly push the organization away from its mission. Our aim is twofold. First, to shift our analytical lens from structures and strategies to the lived experiences of organizational members. Second, to place *emotion*, not just cognition or formal strategy, at the centre of conversation for why organizations deviate from their missions over time.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Mission and Mission Drift

There are divergent views on what Mission is. Some Scholars intertwine mission with purpose, some call it strategy. Mission to (Campbell & Yeung, 1991) is an intellectual concept that should not be discussed/analysed from an emotional angle. They described 'mission' as a set of propositions that can be used to guide the policies and behaviours of a company (p.18). The policies that cover the strategy elements of the mission oversee the commercial aspect, which is important, and the behaviours/values element pertains to the organizational culture. When the two (strategy and culture) are in alignment, the mission is strong, If there is a misalignment, the mission is weak (Campbell & Yeung, 1991). On the one hand, mission is an intellectual concept, on the other, 'Sense of mission' is not an intellectual concept. According to these scholars, 'It is an emotional and deeply personal feeling' (p.18). Someone with a sense of mission is attached and committed emotionally to the company's purpose and vision. Individuals may have a sense of mission with different degrees of intensity, whereas a lot will not, this can apply to both employers and employees. Mission-driven organizations like social enterprises, which have a hybrid nature, operate and utilize entrepreneurial means in ways that are innovative to pursue specific social missions (Bruder, 2025). This means that social problems and justice are simultaneously addressed, and they engage in ethically adequate practices (Lechterman & Mair, 2024).

What happens when employers have a superficial attitude to the mission and sense of mission of the organization they govern? What happens when Thoughtful analysis, thinking for organizational longevity, is neglected or not prioritized? I think the gradual erosion of mission occurs, or what experts will call Mission Drift. (Bruder, 2025) stressed that in social enterprise research of organizations that have failed in their social ambitions, a lot of emphasis is placed on their social missions, and there is a non-existent literature on the “how” dimensions of their practices. Mission drift can be defined as a change that occurs when social enterprises lose sight of their social missions (Wry & Zhao, 2018). Some authors conceptualize mission drift as a process that is deliberately strategic (Casselman & Sama, 2013), while others view it as an unintended outcome (Varendh-Mansson et al., 2020) or possessing both an unintended and deliberate change (Grimes et al., 2019).

Bruder understood drift from a practice-based perspective by combining insights gathered on mission drift research into social issues and organization studies of drifting (Bruder, 2025). He argued that other practice-based approaches have something in common by explaining social phenomena on processual terms and at the same time plugged in to daily happenings and events (Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011, Goldstein & Walgenbach, 2024). Bruder (2025) introduced two types of mission-neutral practice drift. The first, economically driven practice drift, and the second, mission-driven practice drift, which is very pivotal in social enterprise research, highlighting the dark side of social entrepreneurship and putting a spotlight on the processes that birthed it (Dey et al., 2016).

Researchers have discussed mechanisms and measures that have been set up to combat mission drift after it has happened, like social accounting introduction or decision-making processes, which will ensure that there is a stronger stakeholder engagement (Ramus & Vaccaro, 2014). They stated that while these measures and mechanisms are pivotal and important in organization studies, they lack “processual theorizing” (p.388) and have a static bias (Bruder, 2025).

2.2. Macro-level Explanations of Mission Drift

2.2.1. Institutional Logics

Institutional logics, according to (Schildt & Kodeih,2025), are dynamic and change over time. They are replicated through symbolic behaviors and organizational routines. Particularly in hybrid forms, this dynamic interaction between structure and agency helps companies to balance conflicting objectives like market efficiency vs social mission. In Institutional Logics, organizational behavior is guided by socially built patterns of material practices, assumptions, values, and beliefs. These logics influence actors’ interpretations of their roles and strategic choices, frequently in pluralistic situations (Schildt & Kodeih, 2025).

2.2.2. Resource Dependence

According to Resource Dependence Theory (RDT), organizations are dependent on outside parties for essential resources, resulting in power imbalances and interdependencies. In their foundational work, (Pfeffer & Salancik,1978) focused on how organizations handle these dependencies through strategic alliances. RDT has developed to handle autonomy-control conflicts in nonprofit and hybrid organizations, where outside funding can both facilitate and limit strategic decisions (Öztürk, 2020, Arvidson & Linde, 2021).

2.2.3. Identity Work

According to Brown, identity work is continuously creating, negotiating, and upholding one's self-concept within an organizational environment. It shows how people construct cohesive narratives about themselves, frequently in reaction to power dynamics, role expectations, and institutional pressures (Brown, 2021). Identity work is predicated on five fundamental tenets, such as plurality, reflexivity, and the impact of power dynamics (Brown, 2021).

2.2.4. Strategic Leadership

Effective strategic leadership is connected to sustainability, ethical governance, and the development of social capital within and beyond organizational boundaries. Strategic leadership requires vision, adaptability, and the capacity to match internal capabilities with external opportunities. The challenges strategic leaders face in balancing entrepreneurial initiative with managerial discipline, especially in situations that are unstable, are greatly highlighted (O'Shannassy, 2021).

2.3. Limitations of Existing Perspectives

These macro-level perspectives, while valuable, offer an incomplete view of organizational behavior. They commonly under-theorize the mechanism of emotions. It is, therefore, imperative to introduce a theory that shows how subtle events trigger emotional reactions and explains the transmission line between internal actions and external pressures.

Table 1. Macro-Level Perspectives on Mission Drift and Their Limitations (Author's work)

Perspective	Level of Analysis	Central focus	Limitations
Institutional logics	Macro	Norms, systems	Assumes that stakeholders passively take in reasoning, it doesn't explain resistance or emotional struggle.
Resource dependence	Macro	Influence, control, power	Ignores how people emotionally understand or respond to changing demands in favor of concentrating on external restrictions.
Identity work	Micro	Storytelling/narrative construction approach	Underplays affective dissonance and emotional labor, frequently cognitive and discursive
Strategic leadership	Micro	Improvisation, negotiation, adaptability	does not have a defined affective system and views emotion as illogical

Table 1 above shows that these perspectives give an incomplete view of how complex organizational behaviour is. They all under-theorize the mechanism of emotional transmission and why it should be considered. Affective Events Theory (AET), therefore, fills the gap by explaining how subtle events trigger emotional reactions that create a mediating line between internal actions and external pressures.

2.4. Affective Events Theory (AET) as a Bridging Framework

Affective Events Theory focuses on the structure, causes, and consequences of affective experiences at work (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996, p. 11). This focus on affective experiences serves as a counterbalance to other theories, which focus on judgment processes. In affective experiences, job satisfaction is the consequence. Affective Events Theory focuses on events as the immediate cause of emotional reactions rather than the environmental features. People experience things at work and often have emotional reactions to them. The direct influence on behaviors and attitudes that these affective events have, has not been fully explored. Finally, according to the theory of affective events, the structure of environments is just as important as the structure of affective reactions. AET stresses the importance of the psychological experience's structure while recognizing that affect is multifaceted. People may experience pride, joy, frustration, or anger, and these various emotions can have different behavioral effects (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996).

Among the many works in this area, the neglect of affect in strategic decision-making is particularly noteworthy because recent advances in social psychology have shown that affect's influence on cognition is especially noticeable in complex situations that call for substantial information processing, particularly when incomplete information is available (Forgas, 2002). Therefore, it is expected that the affective states of individual decision-makers will have a substantial impact on strategic decision processes in organizations (Ashton-James & Ashkanasy, 2008). AET's basic principle is that organizational members' decisions and behavior at work are far more likely to be influenced by their feelings on a momentary basis than by deeply established value systems or preconceived ideas about those events (Fisher, 2000). Furthermore, one of the main features of emotions is that they constitute "action tendencies" that involve specific behaviors aimed at maintaining or reversing the felt emotional state (Frijda, 1986). As stated, "Emotions, then, can be defined as modes of relational action readiness, either in the form of tendencies to establish, maintain, or disrupt a relationship with the environment or in the form of relational readiness as such" (Frijda, 1986, p.71).

Emotional state-driven conduct is "affect-driven" rather than "judgment-driven (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). Emotional outbursts and sensation-seeking actions, breaking the rules, and risk-taking are examples of negative affect-driven behaviors (Ashkanasy et al., 2002). However, studies have demonstrated that specific emotional states result in specific action-oriented tendencies and, hence, different affect-driven behavior (DeSteno et al., 2000). Numerous studies have shown that individuals in negative emotional states typically exhibit more self-regulation and thorough behavioral monitoring than those in positive affective states (Diamond & Aspinwall, 2003). Managers' monitoring of organizational processes may be influenced by their affect (emotional state). Managers in a positive state may be less proactive in monitoring decision-implementation, compared to those Individuals with a negative affective state who are more likely to perceive and interpret implementation procedures as flawed (Ashton-James & Ashkanasy, 2008).

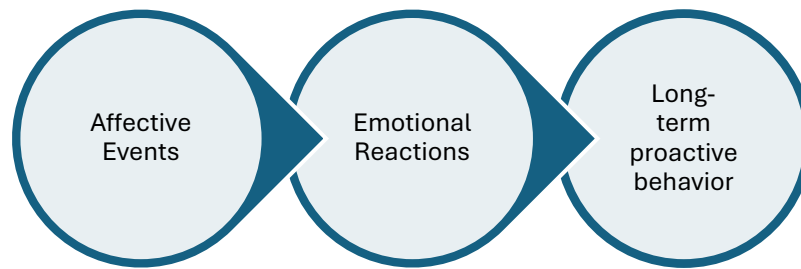


Figure 1: Level 1 Model of Emotions and Proactivity in Organizations extracted from *A five-level model of emotions and proactivity in organizations* (Ashkanasy, 2021)

According to (Ashkanasy, 2021), in Figure 1, Employees experience distinct emotions (like fear, anger, happiness, or sadness) that are acute and object-oriented because of "affective events" that occur in the workplace (such as change or leader behavior). Examples of these include dread of a threat or rage when objectives are not met. Scholars suggest that these emotional reactions, which include moods and emotions, result in one of two behavioral forms. The first is "affect-driven" behavior, which can either be positive or negative. The employee's specific emotional or mood state acts as a mediator between the occurrence and this type of behavior. Job commitment, job satisfaction that follows from an affective event, and the ensuing emotional reaction are examples of the second type of behavior, which is "judgment driven." Emotional people are more likely to be controlled by it, to be preoccupied with it, and to continue in behaviors that are designed to deal with it.

Emotions "disorganize" the interrupted activities and "organize" behavior around the demands of the resulting situation (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). AET proposes that some behaviors are driven directly by momentary feelings rather than by attitudes (Fisher, 2002). Other types of behavior, like proactive behavior, can either be judgment-driven or affect-driven (Ashkanasy, 2021) and are likely to result from carefully thought-out judgments informed by attitudes that are relatively stable. The two variable outcomes described by Fisher, "helping behavior" and "intention to leave", were chosen as potential examples of affect-driven and judgment-driven outcomes (Organ & Near, 1985).

Key propositions of AET include:

- **Events as immediate causes of affect.** People experience discrete events at work (e.g., feedback from a supervisor, a policy change, a conflict with a colleague) that evoke emotional reactions such as pride, joy, frustration, anger, or fear (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996).
- **Emotions as "action tendencies.** Emotions constitute modes of "relational action readiness" (Frijda, 1986, p. 71). They prime individuals to establish, maintain, or disrupt relationships with their environment for instance, to approach, withdraw, comply, resist, or take risks.
- **Affect-driven vs. judgment-driven behavior.** AET distinguishes between behaviors driven directly by momentary affect ("affect-driven" behavior) and those driven by more stable evaluations and judgments ("judgment-driven" behavior). Affect-driven behaviors include impulsive reactions, rule-bending, or confrontations that are closely

tied to current emotional states (Ashkanasy et al., 2002). Judgment-driven behaviors emerge when repeated affective experiences shape more enduring attitudes, such as job satisfaction, commitment, or reinterpretations of organizational priorities (Fisher, 2000, 2002, Organ & Near, 1985).

3. Methodology

This study employed a systematic literature review to analyse the intersection of mission drift, affect, micro-foundations in hybrid and mission-driven organizations. The methodology is aimed at ensuring replicability through clearly defined search and screening. Searches were conducted in Scopus, Web of Science, JSTOR, and EBSCOhost (Business Source Complete, PsycINFO). Search strings combined keywords capture relevant literature, for example: (“mission drift” OR “practice drift” OR “goal displacement” OR “decoupling”) AND (“social enterprises” OR “hybrid organizations”) AND (“affective events theory” OR “emotions and organizations” OR “micro-foundations”). Searches were limited to peer-reviewed articles and scholarly books published between 1990 and 2025. Only English-language publications were included. The initial search yielded about 572 records. After removing duplicates, 326 records remained.

Titles and abstracts were screened against inclusion and exclusion criteria, excluding studies that focused solely on purely commercial firms, treated the mission only as a marketing device, mentioned emotions only on the surface, or were not available in English. This screening reduced the corpus to 50 articles. Full-text screening was conducted to ensure inclusion criteria, resulting in a final corpus of 37 studies. The final corpus was then thematically coded around four domains: conceptualizations of mission and mission drift, macro-level explanations (institutional logics, resource dependence, identity work, strategic leadership), affective processes, and affective events theory, practice-based or micro-foundational accounts of drift. The final corpus comprising 37 studies spanned diverse organizational contexts, including social enterprises and hybrid organizations. The corpus reflects a balanced representation of theoretical and empirical works, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of mission drift through an affective lens. The article is limited by its reliance on English-language, indexed publications and by its conceptual nature. No ethical approval was required, as only publicly available secondary sources were used.

4. Results

4.1. An Affective Events Model of Mission Drift Emergence

This model explains how affective events in mission-driven and hybrid organizations can cumulatively produce mission drift. First, affective catalysts such as stakeholder meetings, resource scarcity, and governance tensions give rise to concrete pressures (e.g., donor restrictions, partner disputes, budget cuts) that are experienced as emotionally charged events. These events trigger emotional episodes and appraisals. These emotional episodes then feed into two pathways. In Pathway A (affect-driven behavior), discrete emotional reactions directly shape immediate responses: for example, a frustrated manager may impose a restrictive rule grounded more in their emotional state than in a considered evaluation of the situation, potentially resulting in denial or termination of services. This mechanism is consistent with findings that positive affect predicts helping and negative affect predicts withdrawal (Fisher, 2002). In Pathway B (judgment-driven behavior), repeated or chronic emotional episodes (e.g., ongoing anxiety, cynicism, or discouragement) gradually reshape cognitive appraisals and priorities, for instance, normalizing the strategic prioritization of financial viability over

mission adherence. Over time, these affect-driven and judgment-driven responses aggregate into an emergent process of mission drift. Rather than resulting from a single pivotal decision, drift arises through the accumulation of small, emotionally informed micro-compromises, as individual decisions and actions compound to erode the organization's mission.

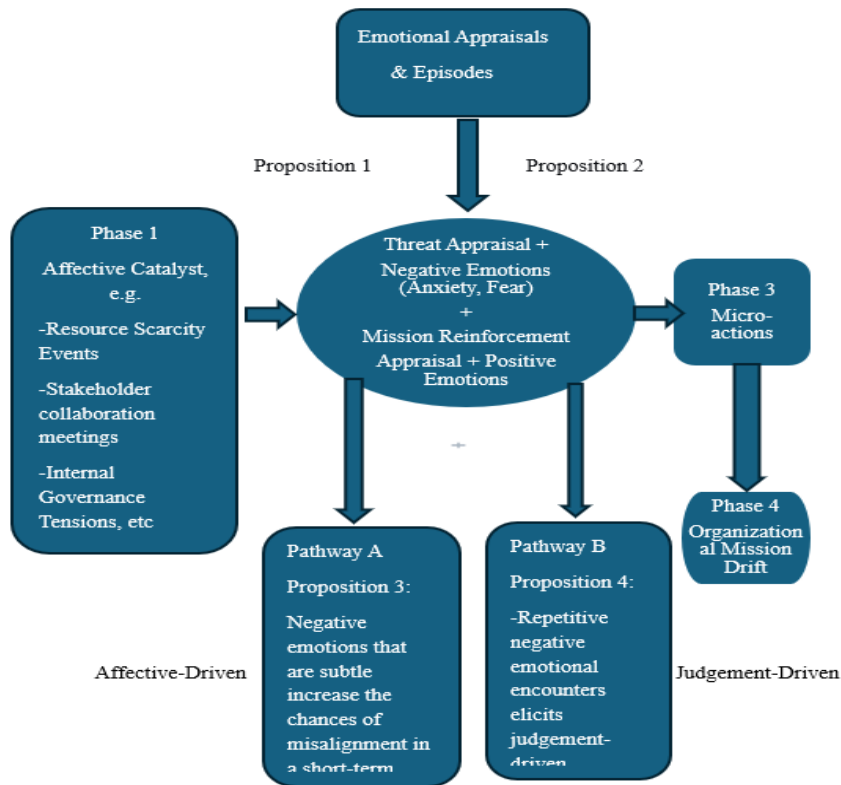


Figure 2: Affective Events Model of Mission Drift Emergence Representation

(Author's work)

In Figure 2, the AET model of mission drift emergence shows how events in the workplace are emotionally charged and ways these events can spur mission drift through a four-phase process. This process starts with affective catalysts like stakeholder conflict, resource scarcity, governance shifts, disruptions, etc, that trigger emotional reactions and appraisals. These reactions may lead to two behavioral directions: affect-driven, where subtle negative emotions prompt brief deviations from the mission, and judgment-driven behavior, where continuous emotional episodes create a strategic divergence.

These micro-actions and micro-decisions accumulate over time, leading to the gradual erosion of the organization's mission. Based on this dynamic, we propose the following key propositions that describe the emotional and behavioral mechanisms driving mission drift:

Proposition 1: Negative Events & Threat Appraisal

Negative events (e.g., resource scarcity, internal governance tension) trigger Negative emotions (e.g., Fear, anxiety) and Threat appraisals, leading to mission drift-inclined reactions.

Example: A sudden budget cut triggers the manager's anxiety, leading to immediate service restrictions that relegate core mission priorities to the task of conserving financial resources.

Proposition 2: Positive Events & Reinforcement

- Positive events (e.g., success stories aligned to mission) trigger positive emotions (e.g., joy, pride), fostering mission-aligned reinforcement.

Example: A huge success story fostering collective pride, strengthening employee adherence to the strict selection criteria of beneficiaries.

Proposition 3: Discrete Emotions & Short-Term Disconnect

- Negative emotions that are discrete increase the likelihood of a brief affect-driven disconnect from the mission.

Example: A manager is frustrated by an event. He/she enforces a rule based on the frustration and not necessarily based on the event, and a denial/termination of service may ensue.

Proposition 4: Repetitive Encounters & Judgment-Driven Drift

- Repetitive negative emotional encounters elicit chronic attitudes (e.g., cynicism) leading to judgment-driven misalignment.

4.2. Emotional Intelligence as a moderator and mediator

The regulation of emotions enables individuals to sustain positive affect, a favorable viewpoint that positively impacts work behaviors (George, 1991, Joseph & Newman, 2010), and to mitigate negative affect (Cheung & Tang, 2012). Individuals with a high level of EI are less likely to engage in workplace misconduct in response to unfairness or fatigue. They have the skills and capacity to manage their emotions and the tools to deal with such adversities: they can achieve a balance through self-control and self-regulation (Shkoler & Tziner, 2017). EI refers to the ability to perceive, understand, regulate, and manage one's own emotions and those of others (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Emotional Intelligence (EI) has been positioned to describe how it can function as both a moderator and mediator within the affective events model, explaining mission drift and how emotional processes influence organizational outcomes.

Emotional Intelligence as a Moderator

EI can moderate the relationship between affective events and emotional episodes or between emotional episodes and behavioral responses:

Negative Emotional Impact buffer: High EI people may generally experience lower levels of negative affect because they can regulate their negative emotions (MacCann et al., 2020). i.e., EI reducing the intensity or duration of negative emotional episodes that lead to affect-driven or judgment-driven mission drift.

Positive Emotional Reinforcement: EI can amplify positive emotional responses (Fiori et al., 2023) to mission-aligned events, strengthening commitment and mission fidelity.

Leadership Influence: Leaders with high EI can shape the emotional climate and influence employees' emotional reactions (Park et al., 2024), thereby moderating the effect of affective events on mission drift pathways. Highly emotionally intelligent leaders are better able to navigate challenging interpersonal situations, build trust, and promote positive workplace cultures (Amisha, 2024), enabling constructive appraisal and emotion regulation among employees. This reduces affect-driven mission drift even in emotionally charged contexts.

Emotional Intelligence as a Mediator

EI can mediate how affective events translate into emotional episodes or how emotional episodes influence micro-decisions and behaviors:

Cognitive Reappraisal: Individuals with higher EI may reinterpret affective events in ways that reduce threat appraisals, or enhance positive appraisals, reiterating that while low EI levels would promote threat appraisals and lower performance, high EI levels would foster positive appraisals and greater performance (Lyons & Schneider, 2005), hence mediating the pathway from event to emotional episode.

Micro-Decisions and Behavioral Outcomes: EI mediates the pathway from emotional episodes to micro-decisions by enabling reflection and deliberate choices rather than impulsive, affect-driven reactions (Roberts, 2025). This mediation explains judgment-driven pathways dominating over affect-driven ones, especially under emotional pressure.

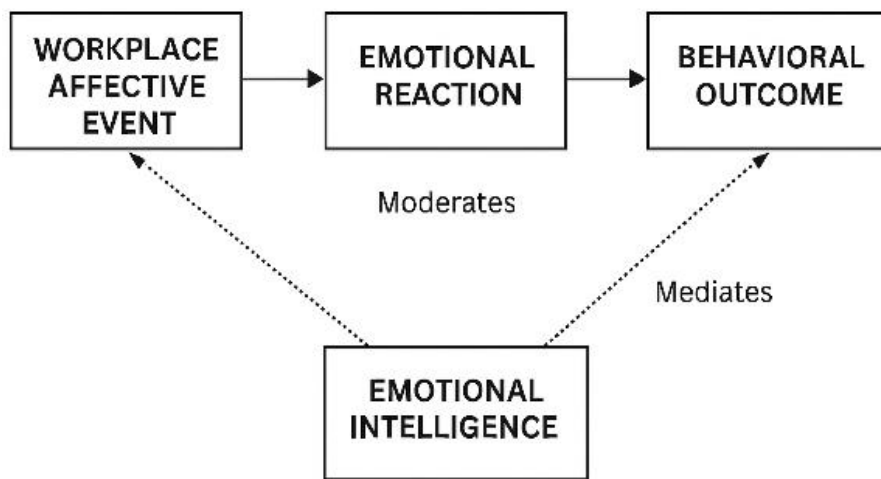


Figure 3: Emotional Intelligence as a moderator and Mediator
(Author's work)

In Figure 3, integrating Emotional Intelligence into the affective events model shows how workplace affective events are antecedents to emotional reactions, which in turn influence behavioral outcomes (Weiss & Copranzano, 1996). Emotional Intelligence, which is introduced into the framework, acts as a *mediator* and *moderator*. EI moderates this connection between affective events and emotional reactions by shaping how individuals appraise and regulate emotional responses. At the same time, EI mediates the pathway from emotional reactions to behavioral outcomes by facilitating adaptive emotional reactions and processing. This approach advances AET by integrating emotional competencies at the individual level, providing a more advanced understanding of affective processes in mission-driven and hybrid organizations.

5. Practical Implications of AET Application

AET Applying Affective Events Theory (AET) to mission drift highlights that organizations can prevent drift by intentionally managing the emotionally specific events that shape micro-decisions. Practically, organizations can implement Proactive Monitoring, a routine process that identifies predictable, emotionally specific moments such as donor negotiations,

budget cuts, and crises, integrating them into leadership mission-risk registers that trigger reflection before decisions drift from the mission. Leadership and staff development can incorporate Emotional Intelligence (EI) training, equipping individuals with skills in cognitive reappraisal, conflict navigation, and emotional monitoring to reduce impulsive, affect-driven reactions. At the routine level, organizations can embed mission-alignment rituals (e.g., check-ins) that help employees process emotionally specific events and reconnect them to organizational purpose. To ensure accountability, organizations can track measurable indicators, including EI-related behavior metrics, mission-alignment dashboards, and logs of high-impact affective events. Collectively, these interventions translate the AET framework into actionable tools that strengthen emotional resilience, support mission-aligned decision-making, and reduce the likelihood of drift emerging through daily practices.

5.1. Limitations and Future Directions

This article is conceptual and thus limited in empirical generalizability, but it opens a research agenda that invites more systematic attention to affect in studies of mission drift. Empirically capturing affective events and emotional responses in mission-driven organizations remains challenging because emotions are often subtle, regulated, or socially suppressed in professionalized contexts that emphasize rationality. Future work should employ methods such as experience sampling, affect diaries, longitudinal ethnographies, and in-depth case studies to trace how specific events, emotional reactions, and micro-decisions accumulate into drift, as well as re-analysing existing mission drift cases through an explicitly affective lens.

Our model currently focuses on individual level episodes, subsequent research should examine multilevel and collective dimensions of affect, including leaders' affective styles and emotion regulation strategies, team level emotional climates (e.g., shared anxiety, collective cynicism, or pride), and the role of organizational culture and HR practices in distributing or containing emotionally charged events through participation, voice, and psychological safety.

Finally, if mission drift is partly an affective process, managing affective events becomes a practical lever for intervention: scholars could investigate how organizations anticipate and design around high-stakes affective moments such as donor negotiations or restructuring, how positive emotional reinforcement for mission-consistent behavior can be embedded in routines, recognition systems, and governance, and how training, reflexive practices, and leadership development can equip actors to navigate emotionally charged trade-offs without defaulting to mission compromising shortcuts.

5.2 Discussion and Conclusion

This study advances a micro-foundational, affect-based account of mission drift in hybrid and mission-driven organizations by drawing on Affective Events Theory (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). It reconceptualizes mission drift as an emergent behavioral process that unfolds through everyday emotionally charged events rather than as a strategic decision or structural outcome (Bruder, 2025, Grimes et al., 2019). Mission-specific affective events, donor negotiations, funding shocks, etc. (Wry & Zhao, 2018) trigger discrete emotional episodes (e.g., fear, anxiety, pride, frustration, relief) that shape both immediate and long-term behaviors (Fisher, 2000, 2002, Frijda, 1986). AET highlights two key pathways: affect-driven behaviors, where momentary emotions lead to short-term, often reactive responses that can incrementally compromise the mission, and judgment-driven behaviors, where recurring affective patterns gradually reshape appraisals of what counts as "mission-aligned". Over time, the aggregation of these micro-decisions of individuals, especially decision-making actors, produces

organization level mission drift as an emergent process of the system. This framework complements institutional logics and resource dependence perspectives (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978, Schildt & Kodeih, 2025, Öztürk, 2021), as well as identity work and strategic leadership accounts (Brown, 2021, O'Shannassy, 2021), by supplying the missing “transmission line” that links macro-level pressures to micro-level enactments.

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